

THE CORNHILL MAGAZINE.

MAY 1891.

THE WHITE COMPANY.

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CHAPTER XII.

HOW ALLEYNE LEARNED MORE THAN HE COULD TEACH.

AND now there came a time of stir and bustle, of furbishing of arms and clang of hammer from all the southland counties. Fast spread the tidings from thorpe to thorpe and from castle to castle, that the old game was afoot once more, and the lions and lilies to be in the field with the early spring. Great news this for that fierce old country, whose trade for a generation had been war, her exports archers and her imports prisoners. For six years her sons had chafed under an unwonted peace. Now they flew to their arms as to their birthright. The old soldiers of Crécy, of Nogent, and of Poitiers were glad to think that they might hear the war-trumpet once more, and gladder still were the hot youth who had chafed for years under the martial tales of their sires. To pierce the great mountains of the south, to fight the tamers of the fiery Moors, to follow the greatest captain of the age, to find sunny cornfields and vineyards, when the marches of Picardy and Normandy were as bare and bleak as the Jedburgh forests—here was a golden prospect for a race of warriors. From sea to sea there was stringing of bows in the cottage and clang of steel in the castle.

Nor did it take long for every stronghold to pour forth its cavalry, and every hamlet its footmen. Through the late autumn

and the early winter every road and country lane resounded with nakir and trumpet, with the neigh of the war-horse and the clatter of marching men. From the Wrekin in the Welsh marches to the Cotswolds in the west or Butser in the south, there was no hill-top from which the peasant might not have seen the bright shimmer of arms, the toss and flutter of plume and of pensil. From bye-path, from woodland clearing, or from winding moor-side track these little rivulets of steel united in the larger roads to form a broader stream, growing ever fuller and larger as it approached the nearest or most commodious seaport. And there all day, and day after day, there was bustle and crowding and labour, while the great ships loaded up, and one after the other spread their white pinions and darted off to the open sea, amid the clash of cymbals and rolling of drums and lusty shouts of those who went and of those who waited. From Orwell to the Dart there was no port which did not send forth its little fleet, gay with streamer and bunting, as for a joyous festival. Thus in the season of the waning days the might of England put forth on to the waters.

In the ancient and populous county of Hampshire there was no lack of leaders or of soldiers for a service which promised either honour or profit. In the north the Saracen's head of the Brocas and the scarlet fish of the De Roches were waving over a strong body of archers from Holt, Woolmer, and Harewood forests. De Borhunte was up in the east, and Sir John de Montague in the west. Sir Luke de Ponynges, Sir Thomas West, Sir Maurice de Bruin, Sir Arthur Lipscombe, Sir Walter Ramsey, and stout Sir Oliver Buttethorn were all marching south with levies from Andover, Alresford, Odiham, and Winchester, while from Sussex came Sir John Clinton, Sir Thomas Cheyne, and Sir John Fallislee, with a troop of picked men-at-arms, making for their port at Southampton. Greatest of all the musters, however, was that at Twynham Castle, for the name and the fame of Sir Nigel Loring drew towards him the keenest and boldest spirits, all eager to serve under so valiant a leader. Archers from the New Forest and the Forest of Bere, billmen from the pleasant country which is watered by the Stour, the Avon, and the Itchen, young cavaliers from the ancient Hampshire houses, all were pushing for Christchurch to take service under the banner of the five scarlet roses.

And now, could Sir Nigel have shown the bachelles of land

which the laws of rank required, he might well have cut his forked pennon into a square banner, and taken such a following into the field as would have supported the dignity of a banneret. But poverty was heavy upon him, his land was scant, his coffers empty, and the very castle which covered him the holding of another. Sore was his heart when he saw rare bowmen and war-hardened spearmen turned away from his gates, for the lack of the money which might equip and pay them. Yet the letter which Aylward had brought him gave him powers which he was not slow to use. In it Sir Claude Latour, the Gascon lieutenant of the White Company, assured him that there remained in his keeping enough to fit out a hundred archers and twenty men-at-arms, which, joined to the three hundred veteran companions already in France, would make a force which any leader might be proud to command. Carefully and sagaciously the veteran knight chose out his men from the swarm of volunteers. Many an anxious consultation he held with Black Simon, Sam Aylward, and other of his more experienced followers, as to who should come and who should stay. By All Saints' day, however, ere the last leaves had fluttered to earth in the Wilverley and Holmesley glades, he had filled up his full numbers, and mustered under his banner as stout a following of Hampshire foresters as ever twanged their war-bows. Twenty men-at-arms, too, well mounted and equipped, formed the cavalry of the party, while young Peter Terlake of Fareham, and Walter Ford of Botley, the martial sons of martial sires, came at their own cost to wait upon Sir Nigel and to share with Alleyne Edricson the duties of his squireship.

Yet, even after the enrolment, there was much to be done ere the party could proceed upon its way. For armour, swords, and lances, there was no need to take much forethought, for they were to be had both better and cheaper in Bordeaux than in England. With the long-bow, however, it was different. Yew staves indeed might be got in Spain, but it was well to take enough and to spare with them. Then three spare cords should be carried for each bow, with a great store of arrow-heads, besides the brigandines of chain mail, the wadded steel caps, and the brassarts or arm-guards, which were the proper equipment of the archer. Above all, the women for miles round were hard at work cutting the white surcoats which were the badge of the Company, and adorning them with the red lion of St. George upon the centre of the breast. When all was completed and the muster

called in the castle yard, the oldest soldier of the French wars was fain to confess that he had never looked upon a better equipped or more warlike body of men, from the old knight with his silk jupon, sitting his great black war-horse in the front of them, to Hordle John, the giant recruit, who leaned carelessly upon a huge black bow-stave in the rear. Of the six score, fully half had seen service before, while a fair sprinkling were men who had followed the wars all their lives, and had a hand in those battles which had made the whole world ring with the fame and the wonder of the island infantry.

Six long weeks were taken in these preparations, and it was close on Martinmas ere all was ready for a start. Nigh two months had Alleyne Edricson been in Castle Twynham—months which were fated to turn the whole current of his life, to divert it from that dark and lonely bourne towards which it tended, and to guide it into freer and more sunlit channels. Already he had learned to bless his father for that wise provision which had made him seek to know the world ere he had ventured to renounce it.

For it was a different place from that which he had pictured—very different from that which he had heard described when the master of the novices held forth to his charges upon the ravening wolves who lurked for them beyond the peaceful folds of Beaulieu. There was cruelty in it, doubtless, and lust and sin and sorrow; but were there not virtues to atone, robust positive virtues, which did not shrink from temptation, which held their own in all the rough blasts of the work-a-day world? How colourless by contrast appeared the sinlessness which came from inability to sin, the conquest which was attained by flying from the enemy! Monk-bred as he was, Alleyne had native shrewdness and a mind which was young enough to form new conclusions and to outgrow old ones. He could not fail to see that the men with whom he was thrown in contact, rough-tongued, fierce and quarrelsome as they were, were yet of deeper nature and of more service in the world than the ox-eyed brethren who rose and ate and slept from year's end to year's end in their own narrow stagnant circle of existence. Abbot Berghersh was a good man, but how was he better than this kindly knight, who lived as simple a life, held as lofty and inflexible an ideal of duty, and did with all his fearless heart whatever came to his hand to do? In turning from the service of the one to that of the other, Alleyne could not feel that he was lowering his aims in life. True that his gentle and thoughtful

nature recoiled from the grim work of war, yet in those days of martial orders and militant brotherhoods there was no gulf fixed betwixt the priest and the soldier. The man of God and the man of the sword might without scandal be united in the same individual. Why then should he, a mere clerk, have scruples when so fair a chance lay in his way of carrying out the spirit as well as the letter of his father's provision? Much struggle it cost him, anxious spirit-questionings and midnight prayings, with many a doubt and a misgiving; but the issue was that ere he had been three days in Castle Twynham he had taken service under Sir Nigel, and had accepted horse and harness, the same to be paid for out of his share of the profits of the expedition. Henceforth for seven hours a day he strove in the tilt-yard to qualify himself to be a worthy squire to so worthy a knight. Young, supple, and active, with all the pent energies from years of pure and healthy living, it was not long before he could manage his horse and his weapon well enough to earn an approving nod from critical men-at-arms, or to hold his own against Terlake and Ford, his fellow-servitors.

But were there no other considerations which swayed him from the cloisters towards the world? So complex is the human spirit that it can itself scarce discern the deep springs which impel it to action. Yet to Alleyne had been opened now a side of life of which he had been as innocent as a child, but one which was of such deep import that it could not fail to influence him in choosing his path. A woman, in monkish precepts, had been the embodiment and concentration of what was dangerous and evil—a focus whence spread all that was to be dreaded and avoided. So defiling was their presence that a true Cistercian might not raise his eyes to their face or touch their finger-tips under ban of church and fear of deadly sin. Yet here, day after day for an hour after nones, and for an hour before vespers, he found himself in close communion with three maidens, all young, all fair, and all therefore doubly dangerous from the monkish stand-point. Yet he found that in their presence he was conscious of a quick sympathy, a pleasant ease, a ready response to all that was most gentle and best in himself, which filled his soul with a vague and new-found joy.

And yet the Lady Maude Loring was no easy pupil to handle. An older and more world-wise man might have been puzzled by her varying moods, her sudden prejudices, her quick resentment

at all constraint and authority. Did a subject interest her, was there space in it for either romance or imagination, she would fly through it with her subtle active mind, leaving her two fellow-students and even her teacher toiling behind her. On the other hand, were there dull patience needed with steady toil and strain of memory, no single fact could by any driving be fixed in her mind. Alleyne might talk to her of the stories of old gods and heroes, of gallant deeds and lofty aims, or he might hold forth upon moon and stars, and let his fancy wander over the hidden secrets of the universe, and he would have a rapt listener with flushed cheeks and eloquent eyes, who could repeat after him the very words which had fallen from his lips. But when it came to almagest and astrolabe, the counting of figures and reckoning of epicycles, away would go her thoughts to horse and hound, and a vacant eye and listless face would warn the teacher that he had lost his hold upon his scholar. Then he had but to bring out the old romance book from the priory, with befingered cover of sheepskin and gold letters upon a purple ground, to entice her wayward mind back to the paths of learning.

At times, too, when the wild fit was upon her, she would break into pertness and rebel openly against Alleyne's gentle firmness. Yet he would jog quietly on with his teachings, taking no heed to her mutiny, until suddenly she would be conquered by his patience, and break into self-revilings a hundred times stronger than her fault demanded. It chanced however that, on one of these mornings when the evil mood was upon her, Agatha the young tirewoman, thinking to please her mistress, began also to toss her head and make tart rejoinder to the teacher's questions. In an instant the Lady Maude had turned upon her two blazing eyes and a face which was blanched with anger.

'You would dare!' said she. 'You would dare!'

The frightened tirewoman tried to excuse herself. 'But, my fair lady,' she stammered, 'what have I done? I have said no more than I heard.'

'You would dare!' repeated the lady in a choking voice. 'You, a graceless baggage, a foolish lack-brain, with no thought above the hemming of shifts. And he so kindly and hendy and long-suffering! You would—ha, you may well flee the room!'

She had spoken with a rising voice, and a clasping and opening of her long white fingers, so that it was no marvel that ere the speech was over the skirts of Agatha were whisking round the

door and the click of her sobs to be heard dying swiftly away down the corridor.

Alleyne stared open-eyed at this tigress who had sprung so suddenly to his rescue. 'There is no need for such anger,' he said mildly. 'The maid's words have done me no scath. It is you yourself who have erred.'

'I know it,' she cried; 'I am a most wicked woman. But it is bad enough that one should misuse you. Ma foi! I will see that there is not a second one.'

'Nay, nay, no one has misused me,' he answered. 'But the fault lies in your hot and bitter words. You have called her a baggage and a lack-brain, and I know not what.'

'And you are he who taught me to speak the truth,' she cried. 'Now I have spoken it, and yet I cannot please you. Lack-brain she is, and lack-brain I shall call her.'

Such was a sample of the sudden janglings which marred the peace of that little class. As the weeks passed, however, they became fewer and less violent, as Alleyne's firm and constant nature gained sway and influence over the Lady Maude. And yet, sooth to say, there were times when he had to ask himself whether it was not the Lady Maude who was gaining sway and influence over him. If she were changing, so was he. In drawing her up from the world, he was day by day being himself dragged down towards it. In vain he strove and reasoned with himself as to the madness of letting his mind rest upon Sir Nigel's daughter. What was he—a younger son, a penniless clerk, a squire unable to pay for his own harness—that he should dare to raise his eyes to the fairest maid in Hampshire? So spake reason; but, in spite of all, her voice was ever in his ears and her image in his heart. Stronger than reason, stronger than cloister teachings, stronger than all that might hold him back, was that old, old tyrant who will brook no rival in the kingdom of youth.

And yet it was a surprise and a shock to himself to find how deeply she had entered into his life; how completely those vague ambitions and yearnings which had filled his spiritual nature centred themselves now upon this thing of earth. He had scarce dared to face the change which had come upon him, when a few sudden chance words showed it all up hard and clear, like a lightning flash in the darkness.

He had ridden over to Poole, one November day, with his fellow-squire, Peter Terlake, in quest of certain yew-staves from

Wat Swathling, the Dorsetshire armourer. The day for their departure had almost come, and the two youths spurred it over the lonely downs at the top of their speed on their homeward course, for evening had fallen and there was much to be done. Peter was a hard, wiry, brown-faced, country-bred lad, who looked on the coming war as the schoolboy looks on his holidays. This day, however, he had been sombre and mute, with scarce a word a mile to bestow upon his comrade.

‘Tell me, Alleyne Edricson,’ he broke out, suddenly, as they clattered along the winding track which leads over the Bourne-mouth hills, ‘has it not seemed to you that of late the Lady Maude is paler and more silent than is her wont?’

‘It may be so,’ the other answered shortly.

‘And would rather sit distrait by her oriel than ride gaily to the chase as of old. Methinks, Alleyne, it is this learning which you have taught her that has taken all the life and sap from her. It is more than she can master, like a heavy spear to a light rider.’

‘Her lady-mother has so ordered it,’ said Alleyne.

‘By our Lady! and withouten disrespect,’ quoth Terlake, ‘it is in my mind that her lady-mother is more fitted to lead a company to a storming than to have the upbringing of this tender and milk-white maid. Hark ye, lad Alleyne, to what I never told man or woman yet. I love the fair Lady Maude, and would give the last drop of my heart’s blood to serve her.’ He spoke with a gasping voice, and his face flushed crimson in the moonlight.

Alleyne said nothing, but his heart seemed to turn to a lump of ice in his bosom.

‘My father has broad acres,’ the other continued, ‘from Fareham Creek to the slope of the Portsdown Hill. There is filling of granges, hewing of wood, malting of grain, and herding of sheep as much as heart could wish, and I the only son. Sure am I that Sir Nigel would be blithe at such a match.’

‘But how of the lady?’ asked Alleyne, with dry lips.

‘Ah, lad, there lies my trouble. It is a toss of the head and a droop of the eyes if I say one word of what is in my mind. Twere as easy to woo the snow-dame that we shaped last winter in our castle yard. I did but ask her yesternight for her green veil, that I might bear it as a token or lambrequin upon my helm; but she flashed out at me that she kept it for a better

man, and then all in a breath asked pardon for that she had spoke so rudely. Yet she would not take back the words either, nor would she grant the veil. Has it seemed to thee, Alleyne, that she loves anyone?’

‘Nay, I cannot say,’ said Alleyne, with a wild throb of sudden hope in his heart.

‘I have thought so, and yet I cannot name the man. Indeed, save myself, and Walter Ford, and you, who are half a clerk, and Father Christopher of the Priory, and Bertrand the page, who is there whom she sees?’

‘I cannot tell,’ quoth Alleyne shortly; and the two squires rode on again, each intent upon his own thoughts.

Next day at morning lesson the teacher observed that his pupil was indeed looking pale and jaded, with listless eyes and a weary manner. He was heavy-hearted to note the grievous change in her.

‘Your mistress, I fear, is ill, Agatha,’ he said to the tirewoman, when the Lady Maude had sought her chamber.

The maid looked aslant at him with laughing eyes. ‘It is not an illness that kills,’ quoth she.

‘Pray God not!’ he cried. ‘But tell me, Agatha, what it is that ails her.’

‘Methinks that I could lay my hand upon another who is smitten with the same trouble,’ said she, with the same sidelong look. ‘Canst not give a name to it, and thou so skilled in leechcraft?’

‘Nay, save that she seems aweary.’

‘Well, bethink you that it is but three days ere you will all be gone, and Castle Twynham be as dull as the Priory. Is there not enough there to cloud a lady’s brow?’

‘In sooth, yes,’ he answered; ‘I had forgot that she is about to lose her father.’

‘Her father!’ cried the tirewoman, with a little trill of laughter. ‘Oh simple, simple!’ And she was off down the passage like arrow from bow, while Alleyne stood gazing after her, betwixt hope and doubt, scarce daring to put faith in the meaning which seemed to underlie her words.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW THE WHITE COMPANY SET FORTH TO THE WARS.

ST. LUKE'S day had come and had gone, and it was in the season of Martinmas, when the oxen are driven in to the slaughter, that the White Company was ready for its journey. Loud shrieked the brazen bugles from keep and from gateway, and merry was the rattle of the war-drum, as the men gathered in the outer bailey, with torches to light them, for the morn had not yet broken. Alleyne, from the window of the armoury, looked down upon the strange scene—the circles of yellow flickering light, the lines of stern and bearded faces, the quick shimmer of arms, and the lean heads of the horses. In front stood the bowmen, ten deep, with a fringe of under-officers, who paced hither and thither marshalling the ranks with curt precept or short rebuke. Behind were the little clump of steel-clad horsemen, their lances raised, with long pensils drooping down the oaken shafts. So silent and still were they, that they might have been metal-sheathed statues, were it not for the occasional quick impatient stamp of their chargers, or the rattle of chamfron against neck-plates as they tossed and strained. A spear's length in front of them sat the spare and long-limbed figure of Black Simon, the Norwich fighting man, his fierce, deep-lined face framed in steel, and the silk guidon marked with the five scarlet roses slanting over his right shoulder. All round, in the edge of the circle of the light, stood the castle servants, the soldiers who were to form the garrison, and little knots of women, who sobbed in their aprons and called shrilly to their name-saints to watch over the Wat, or Will, or Peterkin who had turned his hand to the work of war.

The young squire was leaning forward, gazing at the stirring and martial scene, when he heard a short quick gasp at his shoulder, and there was the Lady Maude, with her hand to her heart, leaning up against the wall, slender and fair, like a half-plucked lily. Her face was turned away from him, but he could see, by the sharp intake of her breath, that she was weeping bitterly.

'Alas! alas!' he cried, all unnerved at the sight, 'why is it that you are so sad, lady?'

'It is the sight of these brave men,' she answered; 'and to think how many of them go and how few are like to find their way back. I have seen it before, when I was a little maid, in the year of the Prince's great battle. I remember then how they mustered in the bailey, even as they do now, and my lady-mother holding me in her arms at this very window that I might see the show.'

'Please God, you will see them all back ere another year be out,' said he.

She shook her head, looking round at him with flushed cheeks and eyes which sparkled in the lamp-light. 'Oh, but I hate myself for being a woman!' she cried, with a stamp of her little foot. 'What can I do that is good? Here I must bide, and talk and sew and spin, and spin and sew and talk. Ever the same dull round, with nothing at the end of it. And now you are going too, who could carry my thoughts out of these grey walls, and raise my mind above tapestry and distaffs. What can I do? I am of no more use or value than that broken bow-stave.'

'You are of such value to me,' he cried, in a whirl of hot, passionate words, 'that all else has become nought. You are my heart, my life, my one and only thought. Oh, Maude, I cannot live without you, I cannot leave you without a word of love. All is changed to me since I have known you. I am poor and lowly and all unworthy of you; but if great love may weigh down such defects, then mine may do it. Give me but one word of hope to take to the wars with me—but one. Ah, you shrink, you shudder! My wild words have frightened you.'

Twice she opened her lips, and twice no sound came from them. At last she spoke in a hard and measured voice, as one who dare not trust herself to speak too freely.

'This is over sudden,' she said; 'it is not so long since the world was nothing to you. You have changed once; perchance you may change again.'

'Cruel!' he cried, 'who hath changed me?'

'And then your brother,' she continued with a little laugh, disregarding his question. 'Methinks this hath become a family custom amongst the Edricsons. Nay, I am sorry; I did not mean a jibe. But indeed, Alleynes, this hath come suddenly upon me, and I scarce know what to say.'

'Say some word of hope, however distant—some kind word that I may cherish in my heart.'

'Nay, Alleyne, it were a cruel kindness, and you have been too good and true a friend to me that I should use you despitefully. There cannot be a closer link between us. It is madness to think of it. Were there no other reasons, it is enough that my father and your brother would both cry out against it.'

'My brother, what has he to do with it? And your father——'

'Come, Alleyne, was it not you who would have me act fairly to all men, and, certes, to my father amongst them?'

'You say truly,' he cried, 'you say truly. But you do not reject me, Maude? You give me some ray of hope? I do not ask pledge or promise. Say only that I am not hateful to you—that on some happier day I may hear kinder words from you.'

Her eyes softened upon him, and a kind answer was on her lips, when a hoarse shout, with the clatter of arms and stamping of steeds, rose up from the bailey below. At the sound her face set, her eyes sparkled, and she stood with flushed cheek and head thrown back—a woman's body but a soul of fire.

'My father hath gone down,' she cried. 'Your place is by his side. Nay, look not at me, Alleyne. It is no time for dallying. Win my father's love, and all may follow. It is when the brave soldier hath done his devoir that he hopes for his reward. Farewell, and may God be with you!' She held out her white, slim hand to him, but as he bent his lips over it she whisked away and was gone, leaving in his outstretched hand the very green veil for which poor Peter Terlake had craved in vain. Again the hoarse cheering burst out from below, and he heard the clang of the rising portcullis. Pressing the veil to his lips, he thrust it into the bosom of his tunic, and rushed as fast as feet could bear him to arm himself and join the muster.

The raw morning had broken ere the hot spiced ale was served round and the last farewell spoken. A cold wind blew up from the sea and ragged clouds drifted swiftly across the sky. The Christchurch townfolk stood huddled about the Bridge of Avon, the women pulling tight their shawls and the men swathing themselves in their gaberdines, while down the winding path from the castle came the van of the little army, their feet clanging on the hard frozen road. First came Black Simon with his banner, bestriding a lean and powerful dapple-grey charger, as hard and wiry and warwise as himself. After him, riding three abreast, were nine men-at-arms, all picked soldiers, who had followed the French wars before, and knew the marches of Picardy as they knew the

downs of their native Hampshire. They were armed to the teeth with lance, sword, and mace, with square shields notched at the upper right-hand corner to serve as a spear-rest. For defence each man wore a coat of interlaced leathern thongs, strengthened at the shoulder, elbow, and upper arm with slips of steel. Greaves and knee-pieces were also of leather backed by steel, and their gauntlets and shoes were of iron plates, craftily jointed. So, with jingle of arms and clatter of hoofs, they rode across the Bridge of Avon, while the burghers shouted lustily for the flag of the five roses and its gallant guard.

Close at the heels of the horses came two score archers, bearded and burly, their round targets on their backs and their long yellow bows, the most deadly weapon that the wit of man had yet devised, thrusting forth from behind their shoulders. From each man's girdle hung sword or axe, according to his humour, and over the right hip there jutted out the leathern quiver with its bristle of goose, pigeon, and peacock feathers. Behind the bowmen strode two trumpeters blowing upon nakirs, and two drummers in parti-coloured clothes. After them came twenty-seven sumpter horses carrying tent-poles, cloth, spare arms, spurs, wedges, cooking kettles, horseshoes, bags of nails, and the hundred other things which experience had shown to be needful in a harried and hostile country. A white mule with red trappings, led by a varlet, carried Sir Nigel's own napery and table comforts. Then came two score more archers, ten more men-at-arms, and finally a rear-guard of twenty bowmen, with big John towering in the front rank and the veteran Aylward marching by the side, his battered harness and faded surcoat in strange contrast with the snow-white jupons and shining brigandines of his companions. A quick cross-fire of greetings and questions and rough West Saxon jests flew from rank to rank, or were bandied about betwixt the marching archers and the gazing crowd.

'Holà, Gaffer Higginson!' cried Aylward, as he spied the portly figure of the village innkeeper. 'No more of thy nut-brown, mon gar. We leave it behind us.'

'By St. Paul, no!' cried the other. 'You take it with you. Devil a drop have you left in the great kilderkin. It was time for you to go.'

'If your cask is leer, I warrant your purse is full, gaffer,' shouted Hordle John. 'See that you lay in good store of the best for our home-coming.'

'See that you keep your throat whole for the drinking of it, archer,' cried a voice, and the crowd laughed at the rough pleasantry.

'If you will warrant the beer, I will warrant the throat,' said John composedly.

'Close up the ranks!' cried Aylward. 'En avant, mes enfants! Ah, by my finger bones, there is my sweet Mary from the Priory Mill! Ma foi, but she is beautiful! Adieu, Mary, ma chérie! Mon cœur est toujours à toi. Brace your belt, Watkin, man, and swing your shoulders as a free companion should. By my hilt! your jerkias will be as dirty as mine ere you clap eyes on Hengistbury Head again.'

The Company had marched to the turn of the road ere Sir Nigel Loring rode out from the gateway, mounted on Pommers, his great black war-horse, whose ponderous footfall on the wooden drawbridge echoed loudly from the gloomy arch which spanned it. Sir Nigel was still in his velvet dress of peace, with flat velvet cap of maintenance, and curling ostrich feather clasped in a golden brooch. To his three squires riding behind him it looked as though he bore the bird's egg as well as its feather, for the back of his bald pate shone like a globe of ivory. He bore no arms save the long and heavy sword which hung at his saddle-bow; but Terlake carried in front of him the high wivern-crested bassinet, Ford the heavy ash spear with swallow-tail pennon, while Alleyne was entrusted with the emblazoned shield. The Lady Loring rode her palfrey at her lord's bridle-arm, for she would see him as far as the edge of the forest, and ever and anon she turned her hard-lined face up wistfully to him and ran a questioning eye over his apparel and appointments.

'I trust that there is nothing forgot,' she said, beckoning to Alleyne to ride on her further side. 'I trust him to you, Edricson. Hosen, shirts, cyclas, and under-jupons are in the brown basket on the left side of the mule. His wine he takes hot when the nights are cold, malvoisie or vernage, with as much spice as would cover the thumb-nail. See that he hath a change if he come back hot from the tilting. There is goose-grease in a box, if the old scars ache at the turn of the weather. Let his blankets be dry and——'

'Nay, my heart's life,' the little knight interrupted, 'trouble not now about such matters. Why so pale and wan, Edricson? Is it not enow to make a man's heart dance to see this noble

Company, such valiant men-at-arms, such lusty archers? By St. Paul! I would be ill to please if I were not blithe to see the red roses flying at the head of so noble a following!’

‘The purse I have already given you, Edricson,’ continued the lady. ‘There are in it twenty-three marks, one noble, three shillings and fourpence, which is a great treasure for one man to carry. And I pray you to bear in mind, Edricson, that he hath two pair of shoes, those of red leather for common use, and the others with golden toe-chains, which he may wear should he chance to drink wine with the Prince or with Chandos.’

‘My sweet bird,’ said Sir Nigel, ‘I am right loth to part from you, but we are now at the fringe of the forest, and it is not right that I should take the chatelaine too far from her trust.’

‘But oh, my dear lord,’ she cried with a trembling lip, ‘let me bide with you for one furlong further—or one and a half perhaps. You may spare me this out of the weary miles that you will journey alone.’

‘Come then, my heart’s comfort,’ he answered. ‘But I must crave a gage from thee. It is my custom, dearling, and hath been since I have first known thee, to proclaim by herald in such camps, townships, or fortalices as I may chance to visit, that my lady-love, being beyond compare the fairest and sweetest in Christendom, I should deem it great honour and kindly condescension if any cavalier would run three courses against me with sharpened lances, should he chance to have a lady whose claim he was willing to advance. I pray you then, my fair dove, that you will vouchsafe to me one of those doeskin gloves, that I may wear it as the badge of her whose servant I shall ever be.’

‘Alack and alas for the fairest and sweetest!’ she cried. ‘Fair and sweet I would fain be for your dear sake, my lord, but old I am and ugly, and the knights would laugh should you lay lance in rest in such a cause.’

‘Edricson,’ quoth Sir Nigel, ‘you have young eyes, and mine are somewhat bedimmed. Should you chance to see a knight laugh, or smile, or even, look you, arch his brows, or purse his mouth, or in anyway show surprise that I should uphold the Lady Mary, you will take particular note of his name, his coat-armour, and his lodging. Your glove, my life’s desire!’

The Lady Mary Loring slipped her hand from her yellow leather gauntlet, and he, lifting it with dainty reverence, bound it to the front of his velvet cap.

'It is with mine other guardian angels,' quoth he, pointing at the saints' medals which hung beside it. 'And now, my dearest, you have come far enow. May the Virgin guard and prosper thee! One kiss!' He bent down from his saddle, and then, striking spurs into his horse's sides, he galloped at top speed after his men, with his three squires at his heels. Half a mile further, where the road topped a hill, they looked back, and the Lady Mary on her white palfrey was still where they had left her. A moment later they were on the downward slope, and she had vanished from their view.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW SIR NIGEL SOUGHT FOR A WAYSIDE VENTURE.

FOR a time Sir Nigel was very moody and downcast, with bent brows and eyes upon the pommel of his saddle. Edricson and Terlake rode behind him in little better case, while Ford, a careless and light-hearted youth, grinned at the melancholy of his companions, and flourished his lord's heavy spear, making a point to right and a point to left, as though he were a paladin contending against a host of assailants. Sir Nigel happened, however, to turn himself in his saddle—Ford instantly became as stiff and as rigid as though he had been struck with a palsy. The four rode alone, for the archers had passed a curve in the road, though Alleyne could still hear the heavy clump, clump of their marching, or catch a glimpse of the sparkle of steel through the tangle of leafless branches.

'Ride by my side, friends, I entreat of you,' said the knight, reining in his steed that they might come abreast of him. 'For, since it hath pleased you to follow me to the wars, it were well that you should know how you may best serve me. I doubt not, Terlake, that you will show yourself a worthy son of a valiant father; and you, Ford, of yours; and you, Edricson, that you are mindful of the old-time house from which all men know that you are sprung. And first I would have you bear very steadfastly in mind that our setting forth is by no means for the purpose of gaining spoil or exacting ransom, though it may well happen that such may come to us also. We go to France, and from thence I trust to Spain, in humble search of a field in which we may win advancement and perchance some small share of glory. For this

purpose I would have you know that it is not my wont to let any occasion pass where it is in any way possible that honour may be gained. I would have you bear this in mind, and give great heed to it that you may bring me word of all cartels, challenges, wrongs, tyrannies, infamies, and wronging of damsels. Nor is any occasion too small to take note of, for I have known such trifles as the dropping of a gauntlet, or the flicking of a breadcrumb, when well and properly followed up, lead to a most noble spear-running. But, Edricson, do I not see a cavalier who rides down yonder road amongst the nether shaw? It would be well, perchance, that you should give him greeting from me, and, should he be of gentle blood, it may be that he would care to exchange thrusts with me.'

'Why, my lord,' quoth Ford, standing in his stirrups and shading his eyes, 'it is old Hob Davidson, the fat miller of Milton!'

'Ah, so it is, indeed,' said Sir Nigel, puckering his cheeks; 'but wayside ventures are not to be scorned, for I have seen no finer passages than are to be had from such chance meetings, when cavaliers are willing to advance themselves. I can well remember that two leagues from the town of Rheims I met a very valiant and courteous cavalier of France, with whom I had gentle and most honourable contention for upwards of an hour. It hath ever grieved me that I had not his name, for he smote upon me with a mace and went upon his way ere I was in condition to have much speech with him; but his arms were an allurion in chief above a fess azure. I was also on such an occasion thrust through the shoulder by Lyon de Montcourt, whom I met on the high road betwixt Libourne and Bordeaux. I met him but the once, but I have never seen a man for whom I bear a greater love and esteem. And so also with the squire Le Bourg Capillet, who would have been a very valiant captain had he lived.'

'He is dead then?' asked Alleyne Edricson.

'Alas! it was my ill fate to slay him in a bickering which broke out in a field near the township of Tarbes. I cannot call to mind how the thing came about, for it was in the year of the Prince's ride through Languedoc, when there was much fine skirmishing to be had at barriers. By St. Paul! I do not think that any honourable cavalier could ask for better chance of advancement than might be had by spurring forth before the army and riding to the gateways of Narbonne, or Bergerac, or Mont Giscar,

where some courteous gentleman would ever be at wait to do what he might to meet your wish or ease you of your vow. Such a one at Ventadour ran three courses with me betwixt daybreak and sunrise, to the great exaltation of his lady.'

'And did you slay him also, my lord?' asked Ford with reverence.

'I could never learn, for he was carried within the barrier, and as I had chanced to break the bone of my leg it was a great unease to me to ride or even to stand. Yet, by the goodness of heaven and the pious intercession of the valiant St. George, I was able to sit my charger in the ruffle of Poitiers, which was no very long time afterwards. But what have we here? A very fair and courtly maiden, or I mistake.'

It was indeed a tall and buxom country lass, with a basket of spinach-leaves upon her head, and a great slab of bacon tucked under one arm. She bobbed a frightened curtsy as Sir Nigel swept his velvet hat from his head and reined up his great charger.

'God be with thee, fair maiden!' said he.

'God guard thee, my lord!' she answered, speaking in the broadest West Saxon speech, and balancing herself first on one foot and then on the other in her bashfulness.

'Fear not, my fair damsel,' said Sir Nigel, 'but tell me if perchance a poor and most unworthy knight can in any wise be of service to you. Should it chance that you have been used spitefully, it may be that I may obtain justice for you.'

'Lawk no, kind sir,' she answered, clutching her bacon the tighter, as though some design upon it might be hid under this knightly offer. 'I be the milking wench o' fairmer Arnold, and he be as kind a maister as heart could wish.'

'It is well,' said he, and with a shake of the bridle rode on down the woodland path. 'I would have you bear in mind,' he continued to his squires, 'that gentle courtesy is not, as is the base use of so many false knights, to be shown only to maidens of high degree, for there is no woman so humble that a true knight may not listen to her tale of wrong. But here comes a cavalier who is indeed in haste. Perchance it would be well that we should ask him whither he rides, for it may be that he is one who desires to advance himself in chivalry.'

The bleak, hard, wind-swept road dipped down in front of them into a little valley, and then, writhing up the heathy slope upon the other side, lost itself among the gaunt pine-trees. Far away

between the black lines of trunks the quick glitter of steel marked where the Company pursued its way. To the north stretched the tree country, but to the south, between two swelling downs, a glimpse might be caught of the cold grey shimmer of the sea, with the white fleck of a galley sail upon the distant sky-line. Just in front of the travellers a horseman was urging his steed up the slope, driving it on with whip and spur as one who rides for a set purpose. As he clattered up, Alleyne could see that the roan horse was grey with dust and flecked with foam, as though it had left many a mile behind it. The rider was a stern-faced man, hard of mouth and dry of eye, with a heavy sword clanking at his side, and a stiff white bundle swathed in linen balanced across the pommel of his saddle.

‘The king’s messenger!’ he bawled as he came up to them. ‘The messenger of the king! Clear the causeway for the king’s own man.’

‘Not so loudly, friend,’ quoth the little knight, reining his horse half round to bar the path. ‘I have myself been the king’s man for thirty years and more, but I have not been wont to halloo about it on a peaceful highway.’

‘I ride in his service,’ cried the other, ‘and I carry that which belongs to him. You bar my path at your peril.’

‘Yet I have known the king’s enemies claim to ride in his name,’ said Sir Nigel. ‘The foul fiend may lurk beneath a garment of light. We must have some sign or warrant of your mission.’

‘Then must I hew a passage,’ cried the stranger, with his shoulder braced round and his hand upon his hilt. ‘I am not to be stopped on the king’s service by every gadabout.’

‘Should you be a gentleman of quarterings and coat-armour,’ lisped Sir Nigel, ‘I shall be very blithe to go further into the matter with you. If not, I have three very worthy squires, any one of whom would take the thing upon himself, and debate it with you in a very honourable way.’

The man scowled from one to the other, and his hand stole away from his sword.

‘You ask me for a sign,’ he said. ‘Here is a sign for you, since you must have one.’ As he spoke he whirled the covering from the object in front of him and showed to their horror that it was a newly severed human leg. ‘By God’s tooth!’ he continued, with a brutal laugh, ‘you ask me if I am a man of

quarterings, and it is even so, for I am officer to the verderer's court at Lyndhurst. This thievish leg is to hang at Milton, and the other is already at Brockenhurst, as a sign to all men of what comes of being over fond of venison pasty.'

'Faugh!' cried Sir Nigel. 'Pass on the other side of the road, fellow, and let us have the wind of you. We shall trot our horses, my friends, across this pleasant valley, for, by Our Lady, a breath of God's fresh air is right welcome after such a sight.'

'We hoped to snare a falcon,' said he presently, 'but we netted a carrion-crow. Ma foi! but there are men whose hearts are tougher than a boar's hide. For me, I have played the old game of war since ever I had hair on my chin, and I have seen ten thousand brave men in one day with their faces to the sky, but I swear by Him who made me that I cannot abide the work of the butcher.'

'And yet, my fair lord,' said Edricson, 'there has, from what I hear, been much of such devil's work in France.'

'Too much, too much,' he answered. 'But I have ever observed that the foremost in the field are they who would scorn to mishandle a prisoner. By St. Paul! it is not they who carry the breach who are wont to sack the town, but the laggard knaves who come crowding in when a way has been cleared for them. But what is this among the trees?'

'It is a shrine of Our Lady,' said Terlake, 'and a blind beggar who lives by the alms of those who worship there.'

'A shrine!' cried the knight. 'Then let us put up an orison.' Pulling off his cap, and clasping his hands, he chaunted in a shrill voice: '*Benedictus dominus Deus meus, qui docet manus meas ad proelium, et digitos meos ad bellum.*' A strange figure he seemed to his three squires, perched on his huge horse, with his eyes upturned and the wintry sun shimmering upon his bald head. 'It is a noble prayer,' he remarked, putting on his hat again, 'and it was taught to me by the noble Chandos himself. But how fares it with you, father? Methinks that I should have ruth upon you, seeing that I am myself like one who looks through a horn window while his neighbours have the clear crystal. Yet, by St. Paul! there is a long stride between the man who hath a horn casement and him who is walled in on every hand.'

'Alas! fair sir,' cried the blind old man, 'I have not seen the blessed blue of heaven this two score years, since a levin flash burned the sight out of my head.'

'You have been blind to much that is goodly and fair,' quoth

Sir Nigel, 'but you have also been spared much that is sorry and foul. This very hour our eyes have been shocked with that which would have left you unmoved. But, by St. Paul! we must on, or our Company will think that they have lost their captain somewhat early in the venture. Throw the man my purse, Edricson, and let us go.'

Alleyne, lingering behind, bethought him of the Lady Loring's counsel, and reduced the noble gift which the knight had so freely bestowed to a single penny, which the beggar with many mumbled blessings thrust away into his wallet. Then, spurring his steed, the young squire rode at the top of his speed after his companions, and overtook them just at the spot where the trees fringe off into the moor and the straggling hamlet of Hordle lies scattered on either side of the winding and deeply rutted track. The Company was already well nigh through the village; but, as the knight and his squires closed up upon them, they heard the clamour of a strident voice, followed by a roar of deep-chested laughter from the ranks of the archers. Another minute brought them up with the rear-guard, where every man marched with his beard on his shoulder and a face which was agrin with merriment. By the side of the column walked a huge red-headed bowman, with his hands thrown out in argument and expostulation, while close at his heels followed a little wrinkled woman, who poured forth a shrill volley of abuse, varied by an occasional thwack from her stick, given with all the force of her body, though she might have been beating one of the forest trees for all the effect that she seemed likely to produce.

'I trust, Aylward,' said Sir Nigel gravely, as he rode up, 'that this doth not mean that any violence hath been offered to women. If such a thing happened, I tell you that the man shall hang, though he were the best archer that ever wore brassart

'Nay, my fair lord,' Aylward answered with a grin, 'it is violence which is offered to a man. He comes from Hordle, and this is his mother who hath come forth to welcome him.'

'You rammucky lurdens,' she was howling, with a blow between each catch of her breath, 'you shammocking yaping over-long good-for-nought. I will teach thee! I will baste thee! Aye, by my faith!'

'Whist, mother,' said John, looking back at her from the tail of his eye, 'I go to France as an archer to give blows and to take them.'

'To France, quotha?' cried the old dame. 'Bide here with me, and I shall warrant you more blows than you are like to get in France. If blows be what you seek, you need not go further than Hordle.'

'By my hilt! the good dame speaks truth,' said Aylward. 'It seems to be the very home of them.'

'What have you to say, you clean-shaved galley-bagger?' cried the fiery dame, turning upon the archer. 'Can I not speak with my own son but you must let your tongue clack? A soldier, quotha, and never a hair on his face. I have seen a better soldier with pap for food and swaddling clothes for harness.'

'Stand to it, Aylward,' cried the archers, amid a fresh burst of laughter.

'Do not thwart her, comrade,' said big John. 'She hath a proper spirit for her years and cannot abide to be thwarted. It is kindly and homely to me to hear her voice and to feel that she is behind me. But I must leave you now, mother, for the way is over-rough for your feet; but I will bring you back a silken gown, if there be one in France or Spain, and I will bring Jinny a silver penny; so good-bye to you, and God have you in his keeping!' Whipping up the little woman, he lifted her lightly to his lips, and then, taking his place in the ranks again, marched on with the laughing Company.

'That was ever his way,' she cried, appealing to Sir Nigel, who reined up his horse and listened with the gravest courtesy. 'He would jog on his own road for all that I could do to change him. First he must be a monk forsooth, and all because a wench was wise enough to turn her back on him. Then he joins a rascally crew and must needs trapse off to the wars, and me with no one to bait the fire if I be out, or tend the cow if I be home. Yet I have been a good mother to him. Three hazel switches a day have I broke across his shoulders, and he takes no more notice than you have seen him to-day.'

'Doubt not that he will come back to you both safe and prosperous, my fair dame,' quoth Sir Nigel. 'Meanwhile it grieves me that as I have already given my purse to a beggar up the road I——'

'Nay, my lord,' said Alleyne, 'I still have some monies remaining.'

'Then I pray you to give them to this very worthy woman.' He cantered on as he spoke, while Alleyne, having dispensed two

more pence, left the old dame standing by the furthest cottage of Hordle with her shrill voice raised in blessings instead of revilings.

There were two cross-roads before they reached the Lymington ford, and at each of them Sir Nigel pulled up his horse, and waited with many a curvet and gambade, craning his neck this way and that to see if fortune would send him a venture. Cross-roads had, as he explained, been rare places for knightly spear-runnings, and in his youth it was no uncommon thing for a cavalier to abide for weeks at such a point, holding gentle debate with all comers, to his own advancement and the great honour of his lady. The times were changed, however, and the forest tracks wound away from them deserted and silent, with no trample of war-horse or clang of armour which might herald the approach of an adversary—so that Sir Nigel rode on his way disconsolate. At the Lymington river they splashed through the ford, and lay in the meadows on the further side to eat the bread and salt meat which they carried upon the sumpter horses. Then, ere the sun was on the slope of the heavens, they had deftly trussed up again, and were swinging merrily upon their way, two hundred feet moving like two.

There is a third cross-road where the track from Boldre runs down to the old fishing village of Pitt's Deep. Down this, as they came abreast of it, there walked two men, the one a pace or two behind the other. The cavaliers could not but pull up their horses to look at them, for a stranger pair were never seen journeying together. The first was a misshapen squalid man with cruel cunning eyes and a shock of tangled red hair, bearing in his hands a small unpainted cross, which he held high so that all men might see it. He seemed to be in the last extremity of fright, with a face the colour of clay and his limbs all ashake as one who hath an ague. Behind him, with his toe ever rasping upon the other's heels, there walked a very stern black-bearded man with a hard eye and a set mouth. He bore over his shoulder a great knotted stick with three jagged nails stuck in the head of it, and from time to time he whirled it up in the air with a quivering arm, as though he could scarce hold back from dashing his companion's brains out. So in silence they walked under the spread of the branches on the grass-grown path from Boldre.

'By St. Paul!' quoth the knight, 'but this is a passing strange sight, and perchance some very perilous and honourable venture

may arise from it. I pray you, Edricson, to ride up to them and to ask them the cause of it.'

There was no need, however, for him to move, for the twain came swiftly towards them until they were within a spear's length, when the man with the cross sat himself down sullenly upon a tussock of grass by the wayside, while the other stood beside him with his great cudgel still hanging over his head. So intent was he that he raised his eyes neither to knight nor squires, but kept them ever fixed with a savage glare upon his comrade.

'I pray you, friend,' said Sir Nigel, 'to tell us truthfully who you are, and why you follow this man with such bitter enmity.'

'So long as I am within the pale of the king's law,' the stranger answered, 'I cannot see why I should render account to every passing wayfarer.'

'You are no very shrewd reasoner, fellow,' quoth the knight; 'for if it be within the law for you to threaten him with your club, then it is also lawful for me to threaten you with my sword.'

The man with the cross was down in an instant on his knees upon the ground, with hands clasped above him and his face shining with hope. 'For dear Christ's sake, my fair lord,' he cried in a crackling voice, 'I have at my belt a bag with a hundred rose nobles, and I will give it to you freely if you will but pass your sword through this man's body.'

'How, you foul knave?' exclaimed Sir Nigel hotly. 'Do you think that a cavalier's arm is to be bought like a packman's ware? By St. Paul! I have little doubt that this fellow hath some very good cause to hold you in hatred.'

'Indeed, my fair sir, you speak sooth,' quoth he with the club, while the other seated himself once more by the wayside. 'For this man is Peter Peterson, a very noted rieve, draw-latch, and murtherer, who has wrought much evil for many years in the parts about Winchester. It was but the other day, upon the feast of the blessed Simon and Jude, that he slew my younger brother William in Bere Forest—for which, by the black thorn of Glastonbury! I shall have his heart's blood, though I walk behind him to the further end of earth.'

'But if this be indeed so,' asked Sir Nigel, 'why is it that you have come with him so far through the forest?'

'Because I am an honest Englishman, and will take no more than the law allows. For when the deed was done this foul and

base wretch fled to sanctuary at St. Cross, and I, as you may think, after him with all the posse. The prior, however, hath so ordered that while he holds this cross no man may lay hand upon him without the ban of church, which heaven forfend from me or mine. Yet, if for an instant he lay the cross aside, or if he fail to journey to Pitt's Deep, where it is ordered that he shall take ship to outland parts, or if he take not the first ship, or if until the ship be ready he walk not every day into the sea as far as his loins, then he becomes outlaw, and I shall forthwith dash out his brains.'

At this the man on the ground snarled up at him like a rat, while the other clenched his teeth, and shook his club, and looked down at him with murder in his eyes. Knight and squires gazed from rogue to avenger, but as it was a matter which none could mend they tarried no longer, but rode upon their way. Alleyne, looking back, saw that the murderer had drawn bread and cheese from his scrip, and was silently munching it, with the protecting cross still hugged to his breast, while the other, black and grim, stood in the sunlit road and threw his dark shadow athwart him.

(To be continued.)

CHAMONIX IN MAY.

'CHAMONIX,' said Mr. Ruskin many years ago, disdainfully, 'is rapidly being turned into a kind of Cremorne Gardens.' Mr. Ruskin's disgust is shared by many of those judicious travellers who go abroad in search of peaceful beauty, and do not care to find the society and tastes of a London suburb translated to an Alpine valley. Even thirty years ago complaints were rife of the spoiling of Chamonix, and many who knew the place in the old days are now afraid of revisiting it. The railway is supposed to have completed its destruction; and it is credibly reported that 'Apollo and all the Muses' have fled the valley before the advance of the railway-fiend from Geneva to Cluses. But, in the epilogue to the most recent edition of 'Modern Painters,' Mr. Ruskin records that he had been there again and found himself inspired as of old by its 'cloudless peace.' When he wrote about Chamonix-Cremorne, he must have been there in August. When he penned his epilogue two years ago, he must have been at Chamonix in the early spring or the late autumn.

The fact is, that everyone goes to the Alps too late or too early. The perfect months are May (running on into June) and October (counting in a little of September); and of the two May is the more perfect. True, the weather is then a little uncertain; but, in August also, the weather can be bad, and when it is bad it is very bad. True, also, the 'Alpine rose' is not yet in bloom. But, if there is none of its 'rubied fire,' neither is there any crowd of vulgarians to put it out. Mr. Ruskin describes somewhere how he was staying once at the Montanvert to paint Alpine roses, and had fixed upon a faultless bloom beneath a cirque of rock, high enough, as he hoped, to guard it from rude eyes and plucking hands. But he counted without the tourist horde. Down they swooped upon his chosen bed; 'threw themselves into it, rolled over and over in it, shrieked, hallooed, and fought in it, trampled it down, and tore it up by the roots; breathless at last, with rapture of ravage, they fixed the brightest of the remnant blossoms of it in their caps, and went on their way rejoicing.' That, of course, must have been in August. In May, the less flaunting Alpine flowers, the verdure, the clear atmosphere—all

are in perfection. Indeed, the valley of Chamonix is in May practically deserted. Those who only know it as thronged by the cosmopolitan crowds of August and September would then hardly recognise it, so quiet and peaceful is it. The hotels have just opened, and there are to be enjoyed all the advantages due to the tourist hordes with none of the drawbacks. You are not crowded out into a little back bedroom over the stables, but are given a spacious and parqueted apartment, with a splendid view on to Mont Blanc. You are not obliged to look at the fire from a respectful distance behind a surly, sleepy crowd in the 'salon,' but have a pile of logs set alight solely on your own behalf by an obsequious waiter. All your movements are not reconnoitred through a telescope, and you do not find the summit of every near hill covered with broken ginger-beer bottles and sandwich papers. The fat landlord stands smiling in the doorway to receive you, instead of bustling you aside to make way for some titled grandee, as would very probably happen later on. He welcomes you as we welcome the early spring birds, heralds of summer, and, taking you aside, informs you, rubbing his hands cheerily, that 'it is well Monsieur has come, for the *chef de cuisine* has just arrived yesterday from Turin for the season.' You realise this important fact when, half an hour later, you sit down to a triumph of the gastronomic art. Lucky mortal!—and all this grandeur is for you, and only you!

So it is worth while to go to Chamonix in May—if only for once in a lifetime—to feel 'monarch of all one surveys.' But there is another and stronger inducement. All nature is then at her best. The low-lying pastures are not burnt up by the sun's rays; the cascades are more abundant; the air is clearer; the freshly fallen snow gleams more brightly; while the flowers are innumerable, and the butterflies also. The droning hum of the grasshoppers makes a kind of sleepy song, to the accompaniment of 'the sound of many waters.' It must surely have been in May or early June that the poet wrote:—

In that thin air the birds are still,
No ringdove murmurs on the hill
Nor mating cushat calls;
But gay cicalas singing sprang,
And waters from the forests sang
The song of waterfalls.

The poor victims of the public schools cannot, of course, get away so early; that is their one privation in exchange for many

greater benefits—their Polycrates's ring, forfeited to assuage Fate. But those who can do so should take their holiday early. It is true that the early-comers lose the pleasant society of their English friends. But it is pleasant, also, to be abroad at a time when there is a chance of meeting others than the friends whom you can see every day at home. Sometimes you meet no other travelers at all; but with the last week of May, two couples arrived at our Chamonix hotel—one American, the other French. The Americans were from Philadelphia, and were very typical of their kind. They were making 'the grand tour' for the sake of the husband's health. Poor fellow! he had been forty years at his business with never a holiday or even a 'day off,' and he had, in consequence, lost all his hair, so that he now wore a luxuriant black wig. His wife informed us in a cheerful manner that 'the medical men said he'd go silly if he stayed at his desk much longer, so they'd now come away for a year's holiday, and had left the son-in-law to manage the "business." They'd come out, bound to see everything; there was nothing they were going to shirk now that they were over in Eu-rope.' The husband was a bright, eager little man, with sharp, beady eyes. Except for the effect of his wig, he looked remarkably youthful. He was enraptured with Switzerland. They had just left Interlaken. 'We've seen the Jung-fraw,' he said. 'Mont Blank can hardly beat *that*.' They had only half a day to spare for Chamonix, and were going on by the Tête Noire in the afternoon. So, in the morning, they went out for a five minutes' walk. 'We've seen it,' said husband and wife, triumphantly, coming back. So Chamonix was ticked off from the list, and they wended their way further. 'For these good people,' we thought, 'even the grand new elevator railroad up the "Jung-fraw" will be superfluous.' The French couple were of a quite different type. The man was an almost exact copy of 'Tartarin,' and his wife was a little, fat woman, who dressed for mountaineering excursions in the extreme of Parisian fashion. These stayed only two days, and their most formidable excursion was on mules to the Glacier des Bossons. Their 'start' on this occasion was very comic. The husband wore an enormous Panama hat, exactly like his wife's, trimmed with a wreath of woollen roses; he got wildly excited, and whacked his poor little mule unmercifully. Two guides, with wild cries, ran after the couple, as their *montures* tore along with them up the road.

These were our only foreign friends at Chamonix in May.

But, foreigners being absent, you have a chance of making friends with the natives. We were fortunate once in finding a friend in our sole travelling companion on the diligence from Geneva. It was a drenching downpour, and 'the gates of the hills' were swathed in cruel grey rolls of mist. But a cheery voice soon came from a tall, somewhat bent, middle-aged man, wearing a peasant's blouse, who astonished us by greeting us in English, with a fine American twang. He was very communicative, and we soon discovered that he was a native of the valley who had just returned from fifteen years' work in San Francisco, having 'made his pile.' He was now prepared to seek a wife, buy a little homestead, and settle down for good in the old country. Accustomed to American go-ahead farming operations, he groaned terribly over the archaic methods in vogue in the valley. 'Ah!' he said regretfully, as we passed one humble homestead after another—each with its rough wooden balcony, its pile of manure heaped up against the house, and its poor garden plot—'ah! I could teach them a thing or two!' He was a knowing hand, this Savoyard-Yankee. Long residence in America had not dimmed his remembrance of his countrymen's ways. At Geneva, he told us with pride, he had purchased his cotton blouse, for otherwise they would have imposed upon him as on a stranger; 'and,' he added, 'I shall save the price of it many times before I get to Chamonix.' And so it proved; for, on comparing our respective diligence fares, we found that, though we all occupied precisely the same seats of that ramshackle old vehicle, he had paid only one-third of what we had. At Sallanches he avoided the table d'hôte and lunched on his own account in a separate room. 'Ah!' he said, on coming out, 'what did you pay? Four francs! Why, I had exactly the same food as you had, but I got it for half the price.' What a pity that we, too, had not invested in blue cotton blouses at Geneva! for, obviously, it is but the blouse that makes the peasant—and commands peasant prices. Our friend bore otherwise no resemblance to a rustic; he was a distinct fraud; his clothes were beyond reproach, he wore gold rings, his shirt was fine, and he fingered his napoleons with the ease of a millionaire. He was very fond of the hills: 'I loved them,' he said, 'when I was a boy, but I hardly dared to speak of them. "Damn the mountains!" my father would say; "they give us no food."'

We parted company with him at Les Ouches, and the rain increasing, our spirits gradually sank so low that not even the

free gift of one hundred days' indulgence each, from a snuffy old priest who had got in at Annemasse, could succeed in raising them. But at the inn a blazing fire, a good dinner, and Mr. King's engrossing book of travels, contented us for that night, and next day the fine weather set in and remained. And what a paradise we enjoyed! If there are days on which 'the heavens seem brought down to the earth,' it was surely those. We seldom made very long excursions; we often started walking without an idea in the world as to whither we were going; and yet we always in the end found ourselves at some foaming cascade, glacier, or point of view. Sometimes we spent whole days on the mountain, fragrant with aromatic scents, without meeting even a peasant in our wanderings. Only the scattered sheep and goats occasionally came up and rubbed their noses affectionately against us. Often close under the 'eternal silences' of the glaciers, we gazed up to where

For a great sign the icy stair doth go
Between the heights to heaven,

and it seemed almost sacrilege to break the stillness. Even the poets have not broken silence before Mont Blanc quite successfully. Coleridge has, perhaps, come nearest to the grandeur of his theme in the 'Hymn before Sunrise,' but he, too, is inadequate.

You can make no 'grand ascents,' of course, in May; but you will be unwise if you do not make friends with a guide or two—they are the pick of the peasants, and all the Savoyard peasants are worth knowing. They are much pleasanter than the Swiss of the Rhone valley; and, indeed, the first thing that strikes one on passing over the Tête Noire to Martigny is the curt grunt—or, oftener, stony glare—that takes the place of the pleasant '*Bon voyage*' on the French side of the pass. It is wonderful, too, how simple and unspoiled the Chamonix people still are, considering the demoralising tendency of the tourist crowd. In May, before the 'season' sets in, they all seem unaffectedly glad to see you, and have plenty of time to talk about themselves. Our chief friend was one Séraphin Simond, of the village of La Tour: he is considered a man of property, for he keeps three cows. As a gentleman of property should be, Simond is a decided Conservative. He would have driven our Savoyard-Yankee friend of the diligence to utter despair, for to Simond every custom of the country was 'as the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not.' Walking one day up the valley, *en route* for the Flégère, we wondered why

every cow or goat pasturing in the meadows required a special attendant—either man, woman, or child—set apart for its own use; no animal being ever seen without its caretaker. We remarked to Simond that this seemed rather a waste of time and energy. '*C'est bien possible!*' gravely replied the owner of three cows; '*mais*'—and this refrain constantly came—'*c'est une habitude du pays.*' Simond was never surprised by anything we said; he listened respectfully, but always remained of his own opinion. However, this particular instance of apparent waste of time is no doubt due to the communal system. The peasant pays so much per cow for the right of common pasturage; therefore his object is that his cow should get as much as possible from the common land and not feed on his own, nor, of course, trespass on his neighbour's. And tending cows is not by any means such waste of time as would appear, for we discovered that you can do three things at a time—mend stockings, carry a load of wood, and tend a cow. Many women knitted beside their cow; one we saw reading a book. Often small children are told off to tend cows and goats, and a pretty handful they seem to find them. At Martigny once we saw a lame old man whose cow was just like a pet dog, turning round to be patted, and even sniffing at his coat-pockets for bread. Although we embarked on no very arduous excursions, Simond expressed great admiration of the powers of walking displayed by 'Madame.' One day, as we were crossing the Mer de Glace from Montanvert, he exclaimed approvingly, '*Madame grimpe comme un chamois.*' Madame felt flattered at this till she remembered that all the guides always said as much, on principle, to everybody. Like the children of Heine's ballad, they have probably

Made the very same speeches
To many an old cat since.

Simond and another guide, Bertrand, accompanied us to the Jardin one cloudless day. Bertrand, a tall, silent young fellow, also pretended to be lost in amazement at Madame's walking. 'Yes, Monsieur and Madame ought certainly to ascend Mont Blanc,' said Simond. 'Madame would do it capitally.' This seemed to require confirmation. Bertrand was appealed to. He grinned, then spoke gravely, 'Two good guides,' he said, 'can safely take anyone—any old gentleman or lady—up Mont Blanc.' This was not so flattering. 'It is a mere nothing of an expedition,' added Simond. 'It may affect Madame unpleasantly at first; she will

be a little sick—*le mal de montagne*—that is all; or she may turn a little black in the face. But we will get her up to the top nicely.'

'*Certainement, car Madame a de bonnes jambes,*' concluded Bertrand earnestly—and critically.

À propos of the ascent of Mont Blanc, Simond pointed out to us a fine house with green shutters, situated high up the valley, near Argentière. This, he said, was inhabited by the well-known English lady who had married her guide after an ascent of Mont Blanc in mid-winter. Jean Charlet, the husband, was '*un pauvre garçon,*' added Simond, and she was '*très riche.*' Jean had been her guide for fourteen years, and they were both middle-aged—nearly forty—when they married, and that was now about ten or twelve years ago. 'Had they ever ascended Mont Blanc since?' we asked. '*Non, jamais. Elle fait le ménage, elle élève ses deux garçons; c'est une personne très convenable.*' 'Are they happy?' we inquired. 'Yes, very,' Simond asseverated. 'She must have been very strong, to have gone up in winter.' '*Oui, c'est une dame très forte, très robuste; elle a de bonnes jambes.*' Bertrand no doubt imagined when he delivered the critical opinion above mentioned that all English ladies were built on the same pattern.

Our favourite halting-place on many excursions was a humble little auberge at the hamlet of Les Ouches, where they never had any kind of meat, but always excellent bread, milk, eggs, and red wine. The landlady and her husband were strong, bustling people, who had a good deal of 'custom' in a small way. We noticed once a little heap of something sitting on a high chair at the door. On looking closer we imagined it to be a sickly baby; but it was the couple's only son, and it turned out that he was over twenty. It seemed that he had had a bad fever at nine years old, and in consequence of this he was all wizened and deformed, and sat all day at the door or in the chimney-corner, propped up on tiny crutches; it was a sad sight. The waiter at Chamonix, who was sympathetic and conversational, told us afterwards that the parents were '*gens de bien,*' and that last year, when the 'conscription' came, the father was obliged, according to the regulations, to bring the boy up to be examined '*pour être soldat,*' and that '*le père avait pleuré en l'amenant.*'

The story brought tears to our own eyes.

This little inn at Les Ouches was a real comfort, for the one draw-

back—if drawback must be confessed to Chamonix in May—was that when on many of our excursions, thirsty and tired, we longed for a refreshing drink, we were apt to find the Alpine inn on which our hopes had long been set all deserted and boarded up for the winter. Most of these high-lying inns do not open until at least the first of June, and only a disconsolate goat or two wandered about their inhospitable doors. But on one occasion, when returning sad and weary, cheated of a meal, from the deserted inn on the Col de Voza, we met an old peasant toiling up the steep hill slope to his poor little chalet, under a heavy crate filled with faggots, we told him how hungry we were, and begged him to direct us to the nearest inn. Instantly he led the way to his poor hut, brought out his rough wooden stools, placing them for us on the grassy Alp outside, and fetched all his provisions. Alas! they were only black bread, and an almost uneatable cheese made from goats' milk. No wine, no milk, did he possess. '*Je suis honteux,*' he said sadly, '*d'apporter cela pour une dame, mais je suis simple paysan.*' We could hardly manage to bite the black bread, but we did our best, so as not to hurt his feelings. He really seemed terribly ashamed to have nothing better to offer us. Poor '*simple paysan!*' alone in his solitary cabin on the far-away Alp with no wife, no child, only a few goats for his companions. Two or three of the common green glazed pots of the valley stood in the windows of his hut, gay with trailing plants. The old peasant was evidently a lover of flowers; perhaps they were the sole brighteners of his solitude.

But happy, after all, is he who can confess to so few wants! Our Savoyard-Yankee, with all his latest improvements in the way of civilisation, is probably the less happy man of the two. We met him again at Les Ouches, just before leaving. He was still loafing about in his blouse, and apparently teaching the rustics a thing or two, for he was followed about by a crowd of admiring little boys. He seemed less bent than before on coming back to settle in his native valley. He was so disgusted, he said, with the poor way in which they lived, and with the old-world style of agriculture. 'But you will wake them up a bit, as you proposed to do,' we remarked a little unkindly. 'Oh, no!' he replied gloomily; 'it's hopeless. I can't get them to pick up any new notion.' So they will remain '*simples paysans*' still. The chance of learning something of these simple peasants is not the least of the charms of Chamonix in May.

IN 'THE PACK.'

ABOUT fifteen years ago Lady Harriette Nicolls wrote to her sister, the governess of Assinololand, a letter, part of which I happen to know ran as follows: 'George Langley has, as usual, been making himself disagreeable, and has given us no end of annoyance. The last thing he has done is to begin building in the field close to our gate on the Maythorpe road. He has run up a row of four horrid, little, frightful houses with windows in the shape of hearts and diamonds, &c., and he is advertising them in the paper as "The Pack." We have quite a view of them from the Elm walk, since the big beech came down, and only last week our Rector was advising Robert to remonstrate with George Langley, as it is such a bad example, and certain to encourage drinking and gambling, and it is most unpleasant for us driving past them to church.'

The houses of which Lady Harriette speaks were indeed erected by Mr. Langley with some chuckling over the probable disapproval of the sanctimonious uncle by whom he considered himself to have been cheated in a business transaction; but they really are not such undesirable dwellings as her ladyship's epithets would lead the reader to suppose. On the contrary, they are, I should say, rather favourable specimens of their kind, that, namely, which is patronised by the numerous class whom fortune has provided with neither poverty nor riches. Situated on a quiet country road, nearly a mile from Densleigh village, The Pack is within a stone's-throw of the shady plantations which skirt the Nicolls's small park, and being surrounded by pleasant, lonely pasture lands, it surveys an unsophisticatedly green and rural prospect not often associated with villa residences. But the most distinctive features of The Pack are those from which it derives its name. This designates collectively four decidedly ornate stucco edifices, separated from one another by intervals of some ten feet, which allow them to rank as 'detached,' and called individually Heart Lodge, Diamond Mount, Spade Villa, and Club House, in appropriate allusion to their respective doors, windows, gates, and porches, which are quaintly fashioned into the characters of the Devil's books. Mr. Langley must have been

greatly smitten with his conceit, to judge from the elaborateness of the detail in which he has carried it out, extending it even to the pattern of the tiled garden-paths, and of the oilcloth in each diminutive hall, thereby much disgusting Mr. Hornidge, the builder, a man who, though far from adverse to jokes in general, being in fact accounted something of a humorist, was disposed to resent any pleasantry involving such serious subjects as bricks and mortar. 'Ten per cent., good, on to the expenses,' it was his habit to say, 'and as like as not as much more off the rent. Hows'ever, Mr. Langley can afford to pay for his vagaries as well as most others,' he would add, his ruffled professional feeling only partially soothed by a consciousness that a certain proportion of the fantastic outlay had found its way into his own pockets.

But though the name did not jump with Mr. Hornidge's humour, and was most severely frowned upon by Rectory and Hall, it was adopted quite enthusiastically by many of the Densleigh folk, and especially by the parties chiefly concerned. I suppose the main reason why we dwellers in The Pack have got on, as a rule, so well with one another and have become, for the most part, such permanent tenants, is that we happen to be a peaceable, steady, unenterprising set of people, fond neither of squabbles nor flittings; still, I always fancy that the eccentric nomenclature of our habitations has somehow acted as a bond of union among us, inspiring us with a species of *esprit de corps*, and causing us from the first to feel an interest in our immediate surroundings which we should not have possessed had we been obliged to describe them by such commonplaces as Prospect Villa or Willow Grove. Perhaps the strongest element in this bond is wit. No outsider could imagine how perennial a source of facetiæ those names afford. From the arrival of the morning letters—and is not an envelope addressed, 'Mr. Bell, Diamond Mount, The Pack,' a passable witticism in itself?—to the extinction of the cheerful lamplight globules in the four little drawing-rooms, when ten to one somebody will say something funny about 'following suit,' occasions for these displays of cleverness are continually turning up. The topic is a perfect godsend to those amongst us who have a reputation for brilliant conversational gifts to keep them unrusted. For, given the presence in the company of anybody connected with The Pack, the slightest emphasising of such ordinary phrases as, for example, 'It's quite on

the cards,' or 'I'm not a good hand at it,' immediately converts the speech into an epigram which is sure to be applauded by members of the audience, who, foreseeing the likelihood of similar openings for distinguishing themselves, are all the readier to establish appreciative precedents. This applause is louder when the speaker achieves an appropriate personality with reference to its subject's abode: 'Ah! Mrs. Lyster's heart's in the right place;' 'We all know that Mr. Hewson's not afraid to call a spade a spade'—but *bons mots* of this calibre cannot be looked for every day. Indeed, many of the jocular remarks with which we neighbours are content to entertain ourselves wholly lack the attribute of novelty, and no doubt for that very reason we 'like them better than a better jest,' the fondness being a propensity easily explicable by the laws of association. We find them useful, moreover, as a means of restoring harmony, for if any coolness or unpleasantness has sprung up between two of us, there is no easier way of sliding back into the old friendly groove than through the interposition of such a joke, the perpetrating and recognising of which are always regarded as a tacit reconciliation, and often have I seen scared good humour lured back by recourse to this simple expedient.

It is true that a less kindly use has sometimes been made of these opportunities. Rumours have occasionally reached me from the village of bitter allusions to packs of fools, and other disparaging sarcasms; but these are very rare exceptions, and have never resulted in putting us out of conceit with the idea, which we rival one another in attempts to realise effectively. Thus the Hewsons' ten-of-spades flower-beds were much admired, and flattered by speedy imitation along the rest of the row, whilst our own device of filling our diamond-shaped casements with glowing scarlet blinds was considered extremely happy, and Tom Bridgford's note-paper stamped with tiny clubs seemed almost too subtle and recondite a flight of fancy. Then one spring the Miss Lysters came out in smart white dresses upon which they had sewed innumerable little hearts made of some thin pink stuff. But I believe that one of their Rochester cousins who soon afterwards came to stay with them must have condemned these costumes as vulgar, for they were presently discarded, and once, when Dora Hewson said something about them, I noticed that the girls looked discomfited, and seemed to avoid the subject.

The Lysters lived in Heart Lodge, which stands at the east end

of our row. Their family consisted of father, mother, and two daughters, for the only son, being generally at sea, did not count. They were our newest comers, having, at the time I am thinking of, been only about three years in residence, and they were also, not quite solely for this reason, the least esteemed inmates of The Pack. Not that we had any particularly serious fault to find with them. It was rather that the Lysters' family failings were of a kind calculated to wound their neighbours' sensibilities more than some ethically graver delinquencies would have done; these failings being chiefly manifested in a tendency to give themselves airs and think themselves better than other people, '*why, goodness only knows,*' as we always said when discussing the matter. Perhaps the reason why partly lay in the circumstance that the Lysters were a little richer than the rest of us, and had been accustomed, before their father's retirement from business, to live upon a larger scale, so that *they* regarded The Pack as somewhat of a 'come down' in the world, whereas *we* were inclined to plume ourselves upon the gentility of our abodes. Again, the satisfactory proportion between the size of their income and of their domestic circle enabled them to do much more in what we, when censoriously minded, called 'the gadding about' line than could be attempted by us, whose resources would not stand the rapid transmutation of shillings and pounds into hotel bills and railway tickets; and some of us did not enjoy being asked what our plans were for Easter, or Whitsun week, or the summer holidays, when we happened to have no plans at all. But perhaps the most important point about them was the fact that they were blessed with relations of the buoying-up air-bladder type, which forms so enviable a contrast to the depressing dead-weights whom many of us are fain to number among our kin. Their relatives seemed almost without exception to occupy that position in the social scale which renders it a pride and pleasure to make mention of their names with the prefix of 'my uncle' or 'my cousin;' and the Lysters frequently indulged themselves in this way. One family of cousins there was residing near Rochester whom they appeared to consider peculiarly distinguished, and it was upon the occasion of visits from these prized connections that we had observed a disposition to ignore customary intimacies, and to assume an attitude of temporary aloofness, which naturally outraged our proper pride and stiffened our manners for some weeks afterwards. Apart from those specially irritating circum-

stances, however, we really liked the Lysters well enough. The girls were bright and talkative, and Maud was rather pretty.

Next to Heart Lodge comes Diamond Mount, where I board and lodge, though, by virtue of a very distant cousinship and a very close friendship between myself and the house's mistress, my position in the establishment is never regarded from the hard, cold point of view which that phrase suggests. Mrs. Wyatt is a lady whom her friends wish otherwise in one respect alone, namely, the number of years by which her age exceeds fourscore; and even this drawback is easily forgotten in her company, so cheerful, alert, sensible, and sympathetic is she, so bright are her dark eyes under her white spun-glasslike hair, and so shrewd and kindly, and withal up to date, are her comments upon their long course of observations. Here also dwelt Mr. John Connor, her younger brother, and Miss Gertrude Banks, her niece, an old maid, middle-aged and poor.

Spade Villa adjoins Diamond Mount, and at this time was very densely populated by the Hewson family. Two grown-up daughters, two big boys at school, and five or six smaller fry served as ample explanatory notes to the not unfrequently harassed looks of Mr. Hewson, who had a not more than tolerably good solicitor's practice in Maythorpe, and accounted for the slightly dilapidated and shabby condition of their furniture and premises, where the locust-like ravages of the children outstripped the possibilities of replacement and repair. Under these circumstances, I was pleased to observe that the girls managed to keep themselves trimly and freshly attired, a result which was, I believe, principally due to the exertions of Miss Etta, the eldest sister, for Miss Dora had studious tastes, and was more indifferent to her toilet than behoves a young lady of eighteen, her mind being divided between her books and repinings over the restrictions which her sex imposed upon the utilisation of her learning. 'Miss Dora Hewson goes in for Latin and Euclid, doesn't she?' Hume Bridgford said to me one day; 'she looks as if she did, at any rate,' added the Oxonian superciliously, evincing that want of appreciation for female thirst after knowledge which is so often noticeable among his compeers. Etta Hewson had no such misplaced propensities. A pretty edition of her hard-featured sister, and constitutionally light-hearted and good-tempered, she generally seemed to be well contented with her lot in life, a little dull, perhaps, now and then, or a little worried by the children, but, upon the whole, fleeing

the time carelessly enough, untroubled by darker forward-looking thoughts than suit the golden age of twenty.

Westward The Pack terminated in Club House, the Bridgfords' abode. Old Mr. Bridgford had also retired from business, over the nature of which, however, he made no attempt to throw that glamour of vagueness diffused by the word 'merchant' wherewith the Lysters sought to invest their antecedents. All the world were welcome to know, so far as he was concerned, that he had been the senior partner in the firm of Bridgford and Peters, who had for many years carried on business as seedsmen in York; not over prosperously of late, so that he had been able to dispose of his share in the concern upon only moderately advantageous terms when he withdrew into private life. The Bridgfords, like the Hewsons and ourselves, were, so to speak, autochthons, having inhabited Club House ever since its walls were dry, though their numbers had been diminished by the marriage of both daughters and the departure of the eldest son to grow tea in Assam, whence he had before very long despatched a pair of small, fat, anything but exotic-looking children to be spoiled by his old mother at home. The only one of the young people, therefore, still permanently quartered at Club House was Tom, who had a good clerkship in Maythorpe, whither he repaired every morning, perched atop of a big intricately spoked wheel like a gigantic spider's web. His youngest brother, Hume, was for the most part absent, keeping his terms at Oxford, having attained to a university career through the aid of a scholarship and a maternal uncle. If a stranger had been called upon to point out which of the two brothers was the undergraduate of Christ Church, he would probably have guessed wrong, for Hume Bridgford was not only awkward and shy—qualities compatible enough with the *rôle* of a reading man—but had also, despite his unquestioned abilities, a dull and heavy countenance, joined to a generally bucolic aspect more suggestive of agricultural than of academic pursuits; whereas Tom, besides being a tall, good-looking young fellow, well set up, athletic, and slightly military in appearance, possessed the further advantages of easy, polished manners, and a certain high-bred air for which we found it difficult to account except by supposing him to have inherited it from his mother's family, who were rumoured to have regarded her marriage as a *mésalliance*. It was not, however, merely the possession of these superficial merits that had made Tom Bridgford so great a favourite with us of Diamond Mount, second only,

indeed, to Etta Hewson, who had been long installed in the position of the nicest girl we knew; for the lad was well-principled and far from unintelligent, being gifted with a sense of humour which saved him from either priggishness or cynicism.

At the time I think of our interest in these two young people was enhanced by the fact that, having watched them grow up together from mere children, seeing the frankness of ten and twelve supplanted by hobbledehoy seventeen's gawky indifference and the monosyllabic bashfulness of unformed fifteen, we had latterly noted signs which led us to augur the springing up of an attachment between our favourites. My cousin and I had never alluded to the subject, but I believe that each was quite aware of the other's surmise, and that we both agreed in looking on with approbation. It was true that the match would be a by no means wealthy one, but Tom's prospects were fairly good, as with all his athletic feats and soldierly bearing he was admitted to have a clear head for business, and to be as steady as old Time; whilst the portionless Etta was simple in her tastes, and had already manifested some talent for thrifty housekeeping. Altogether we deemed ourselves justified in feeling the satisfaction with which, in these days of multiplying old maids, a benevolent elder may see a young life timely quitting the path towards their forlorn precincts by the safe and honourable exit of a genuine love marriage.

This being so, it was with no small chagrin that in the course of the particular summer which I have in my mind we perceived a gradual clouding over of our hitherto sunny little romance. It is not improbable that several minor causes may have co-operated in bringing about this effect, but it is certain that the most potent, and to us the most patent one, was the prolonged sojourn at Heart Lodge of the Lysters' cousin, Miss Daisy Hancock. She was a young lady who, as a general rule, looked about five-and-twenty, though when she was tired or cross, certain fine lines showed themselves at the corners of her eyes and mouth, as old finger-marks reappear when you breathe upon glass, and wrote her down some years nearer thirty. Be this as it may, the only fact about her which much concerns us here was that she belonged to the class of women who find existence impracticable without some phantom, at least, of what housemaids naively term a follower, and for whose peace of mind it is well that the activity of their imaginations is but little impeded by the discouragingly passive demean-

nour of any individual whom they may elect to look upon in that light. Daisy Hancock, like all those of her clan who are meagrely endowed with personal charms, had gained considerable experience in the conduct of more or less lopsided flirtations, and accordingly, having once determined that Tom Bridgford was to be their object, she began her manoeuvres with a veteran's composure and *aplomb*. Have we not all seen the like? She made Tom teach her chess; she requested him to button her gloves; she gave him commissions to execute for her in Maythorpe (which was really rather stupid of her, as small parcels are irritating companions upon a bicycle); she took short strolls along the Maythorpe road to meet him on his way back from his office—a thing Etta Hewson would not have done for her weight in gold—and caused him to walk home beside her trundling his tall 'express;' she painted a device of clubs, rather badly, upon the handle of his tennis-racket; she sang what she said were his favourite songs, and she asked his opinion and advice upon all manner of subjects.

It need not be assumed, however, that in all this she had any more serious purpose before her than to amuse herself for a while in a way which, she imagined, gave her some prestige, and her proceedings some *éclat*, in her neighbours' eyes; and Tom himself quite understood the situation, and was slightly bored thereby, as I judged from the increasing frequency with which he absented himself from The Pack on Saturday half-holidays. But it was otherwise with Etta. Her experience of society had been extremely limited, nor were there in her own character and tastes any elements calculated to give her an intuitive insight into the nature of the phenomena presented by Miss Hancock. All she saw was that Tom and the new-comer were constantly laughing and talking together in tones of easy familiarity upon which she, reasoning from very imperfect analogies, could only put one interpretation. She neither detected nor suspected the petty stratagems by which Miss Hancock achieved that monopoly of Tom's society, but their success was painfully apparent to her, and, if I am not much mistaken, caused her many a melancholy hour. As the weeks went on, she grew very pale and quiet. At the best of times she was rather subject to shy fits, the presence of a single stranger often sufficing to envelop her in a silent and sad-visaged primness; but she now seemed to have permanently retreated behind that effacing screen, and on more than one occasion I saw Tom look puzzled and disconcerted when his remarks

were responded to across an icy distance, the origin of which he was very far from divining. Matters, moreover, were presently further complicated by the arrival of Hume Bridgford to spend the long vacation. For it so happened that he, simply because she, as an old acquaintance, was less formidable to him than the Miss Lysters, whilst he suspected her sister Dora of desiring to engage him in learned discourse, attached himself to Etta with a marked exclusiveness which the casual observer might easily have attributed to other motives, and which she met with a frank friendliness surviving from the time when she used to pity the ungainly schoolboy for always looking so awkward and uncomfortable.

Under ordinary circumstances Tom would have thought nothing of this, the idea of Hume becoming his rival in any more practical matters than hendecasyllables or conjectural emendations being so entirely heterogeneous with all the growths of his previous experience that it could not easily take root in his mind. But now Etta's coldness had roused a sensitiveness in him which was, I fancy, heightened by jokes and insinuations upon the part of Daisy Hancock, whom I once overheard saying something to him about 'the Inseparables' which made him look positively ferocious. It was soon after this that he began to talk, quite seriously, as it seemed, about a promising opening for himself which he had heard of in an Australian house of business, and, upon the whole, affairs assumed an aspect which threatened to terminate in a case of 'shy she was, and I thought her proud, thought her cold, and fled over the sea.'

This unsatisfactory state of things weighed a good deal upon my mind, and quite spoiled my pleasure in watching the little groups upon the lawn-tennis ground in the field at the back of The Pack, whither it was the custom of our young people to resort of an afternoon; for the partners always 'sorted themselves' wrongly. Having a Promethean amount of leisure on hand, I could, and did, devote much time to observing the progress of the estrangement, until at last I became so well versed in the ins and outs of it, and could read so clearly between the lines of many trivial speeches and actions, that I occasionally felt half-guilty, as if I had obtained my knowledge by some surreptitious or otherwise unjustifiable means. This feeling was particularly strong upon me one day, when I heard Etta, who was paying us an early visit, say in a restless sort of way to my cousin, as they sat together

over their knitting: 'Mrs. Wyatt, don't you sometimes get horribly tired of always living in the same place?' And at the same time I so vividly realised the frame of mind which had prompted Etta's speech, that I was almost disposed to blame my cousin for want of sympathy in her calm reply: 'I sometimes did when I was your age, my dear.' That accusation, however, would have been an entirely unfounded one, as I have since seen reason to believe.

Etta had not left us long, when Mrs. Wyatt said: 'Do you know I've been thinking of writing and advising my grandnephew, Reginald Strong, to come here in Mr. Madden's place?' (Mr. Madden was the Densleigh curate, whose health this summer compelled him to take a long holiday.) 'I know that the Rector has not heard of anyone yet, and is in straits for a stop-gap. Reginald is not overburdened with brains, but he is not a bad kind of boy, and he has just left his last curacy. If he comes,' my cousin continued in a tone intended to convey the impression that she regarded this point as a mere matter of detail, which, to the best of my belief, was *not* the case, 'we could put him up here, and save him the expense of lodgings.'

And so it came about that the next week saw the Rev. Reginald De Burgh Strong established at Diamond Mount. He was, as his grandaunt had candidly owned, not endowed with any very brilliant intellectual gifts; but he was, what proved much more to her purpose, rather good-looking in the mediæval saint style, exceedingly Ritualistic, and remarkably fond of female society. It should in justice be observed that he possessed some other more intrinsically valuable qualities, though with these we have at present nothing to do. His advent occasioned quite a revolution in The Pack. If the whole bench of bishops had come among us, they could not have imported with them a more ecclesiastical atmosphere. Incense, candles, Gregorians, and vestments became the prevailing topics of conversations in which the Rev. Reginald's late rector, who had been convicted of holding highly unorthodox views upon these points, occupied the position of reigning bugbear. The Miss Lysters succumbed at once: before a week had passed they were working an altar-mat. Our Miss Banks took to fasting on Fridays, which, poor soul, was the only demonstration which her means allowed her to make. Even fat, jolly Mrs. Hewson was slightly infected, and having with some difficulty stirred up Dora—for Etta, who remained proof against the curate's charms, upon this occasion showed herself most unusually obdurate about falling

in with her mother's wishes—went off with her and some reluctant smaller children to early matins; whilst the tennis-ground was deserted on the very finest afternoons, owing to a sudden recollection of the long-ignored fact that evensong began at half-past five.

It need scarcely be said that this enthusiasm was not shared by the male portion of our community. On the contrary, a studiously apathetic and superciliously non-participant attitude was adopted by them, enlivened now and then with a sarcastic sally; as when, for instance, Hume Bridgford was once heard announcing to an audience of scandalised maidens that he had a great mind to ask Mr. Strong to new baptise our dwellings by the name of 'Lamb Lodge, Sheep Villa, Mutton House, Shepherd Mount, The Flock;' a reckless project which he, of course, had no intention of carrying out, though his enjoyment of the pleasantry had made him forget his shyness; and I saw the proud consciousness of it in his face all through Mr. Strong's sermon on the following Sunday. But as for my cousin and me, albeit nowise tempted to join the worshipping party, we watched its proceedings well content, for most prominent among the devotees was Daisy Hancock, the consequence being that the unflagging current of her attentions, which had lately flowed around Tom, suddenly slipped away into another channel, and that our pair of lovers, who had seemingly begun to drift apart upon a stream of trivialities, now drew together again, only dimly conscious of what the sundering influence had been. A conviction that all would go well was borne in upon me from the first moment when I saw Miss Hancock busied with crimson silk and gold thread, the ingredients of a pair of bookmarkers for the lectern at St. Luke's. But my apprehensions finally departed one soft late August afternoon, when I saw from my window Tom and Etta alone upon the tennis-ground, ostensibly engaged in a single match, though to a close observer the game appeared to be a curious one, its rules requiring the frequent presence of both players upon the same side of the net, over which the balls sent to and fro were very few and far between; whilst a little way down the road I descried a female group escorting a long black figure in the direction of a bell which was tinkling from behind a clump of trees hard by. And were this narrative carried much further, I should come upon a theme to which I cannot here do justice—a wedding in The Pack.

THE GREENWOOD TREE.

It is a common, not to say a vulgar error, to believe that trees and plants grow out of the ground. And of course, having thus begun by calling it bad names, I will not for a moment insult the intelligence of my readers by supposing them to share so foolish a delusion. I beg to state from the outset that I write this article entirely for the benefit of Other People. You and I, O proverbially Candid and Intelligent One, it need hardly be said, are better informed. But Other People fall into such ridiculous blunders that it is just as well to put them on their guard beforehand against the insidious advance of false opinions. I have known otherwise good and estimable men, indeed, who for lack of sound early teaching on this point went to their graves with a confirmed belief in the terrestrial origin of all earthly vegetation. They were probably victims of what the Church in its succinct way describes and denounces as *Invincible Ignorance*.

Now the reason why these deluded creatures supposed trees to grow out of the ground, instead of out of the air, is probably only because they saw their roots there. Of course, when people see a wallflower rooted in the clefts of some old church tower, they don't jump at once to the inane conclusion that it is made of rock—that it derives its nourishment direct from the solid limestone; nor when they observe a barnacle hanging by its sucker to a ship's hull, do they imagine it to draw up its food incontinently from the copper bottom. But when they see that familiar pride of our country, a British oak, with its great underground buttresses spreading abroad through the soil in every direction, they infer at once that the buttresses are there, not—as is really the case—to support it and uphold it, but to drink in nutriment from the earth beneath, which is just about as capable of producing oak-wood as the copper plate on the ship's hull is capable of producing the flesh of a barnacle. Sundry familiar facts about manuring and watering, to which I will return later on, give a certain colour of reasonableness, it is true, to this mistaken inference. But how mistaken it really is for all that, a single and very familiar little experiment will easily show one.

Cut down that British oak with your Gladstonian axe; lop

him of his branches; divide him into logs; pile him up into a pyramid; put a match to his base; in short, make a bonfire of him; and what becomes of robust majesty? He is reduced to ashes, you say. Ah, yes, but what proportion of him? Conduct your experiment carefully on a small scale; dry your wood well, and weigh it before burning; weigh your ash afterwards, and what will you find? Why, that the solid matter which remains after the burning is a mere infinitesimal fraction of the total weight: the greater part has gone off into the air, from whence it came, as carbonic acid. Dust to dust, ashes to ashes; but air to air, too, is the rule of nature.

It may sound startling—to Other People, I mean—but the simple truth remains, that trees and plants grow out of the atmosphere, not out of the ground. They are, in fact, solidified air; or to be more strictly correct, solidified gas—carbonic acid.

Take an ordinary soda-water syphon, with or without a wine-glassful of brandy, and empty it till only a few drops remain in the bottom. Then the bottle is full of gas; and that gas, which will rush out with a spurt when you press the knob, is the stuff that plants eat—the raw material of life, both animal and vegetable. The tree grows and lives by taking in the carbonic acid from the air, and solidifying its carbon; the animal grows and lives by taking the solidified carbon from the plant, and converting it once more into carbonic acid. That, in its ideally simple form, is the Iliad in a nutshell, the core and kernel of biology. The whole cycle of life is one eternal see-saw. First the plant collects its carbon compounds from the air in the oxidised state; it deoxidises and rebuilds them: and then the animal proceeds to burn them up by slow combustion within his own body, and to turn them loose upon the air, once more oxidised. After which the plant starts again on the same round as before, and the animal also recommences *da capo*. And so on *ad infinitum*.

But the point which I want particularly to emphasise here is just this: that trees and plants don't grow out of the ground at all, as most people do vainly talk, but directly out of the air; and that when they die or get consumed, they return once more to the atmosphere from which they were taken. Trees undeniably eat carbon.

Of course, therefore, all the ordinary unscientific conceptions of how plants feed are absolutely erroneous. Vegetable physiology, indeed, got beyond those conceptions a good hundred years ago.

But it usually takes a hundred years for the world at large to make up its leeway. Trees don't suck up their nutriment by the roots, they don't derive their food from the soil, they don't need to be fed, like babies through a tube, with terrestrial solids. The solitary instance of an orchid hung up by a string in a conservatory on a piece of bark, ought to be sufficient at once to dispel for ever this strange illusion—if people ever thought; but of course they don't think—I mean Other People. The true mouths and stomachs of plants are not to be found in the roots, but in the green leaves; their true food is not sucked up from the soil, but is inhaled through tiny channels from the air; the mass of their material is carbon, as we can all see visibly to the naked eye when a log of wood is reduced to charcoal: and that carbon the leaves themselves drink in, by a thousand small green mouths, from the atmosphere around them.

But how about the juice, the sap, the qualities of the soil, the manure required? is the incredulous cry of Other People. What is the use of the roots, and especially of the rootlets, if they are not the mouths and supply-tubes of the plants? Well, I plainly perceive I can get 'no forrader,' like the farmer with his claret, till I've answered that question, provisionally at least; so I will say here at once, without further ado—the plant requires drink as well as food, and the roots are the mouths that supply it with water. They also suck up a few other things as well, which are necessary indeed, but far from forming the bulk of the nutriment. Many plants, however, don't need any roots at all, while none can get on without leaves as mouths and stomachs. That is to say, no true plantlike plants, for some parasitic plants are practically, to all intents and purposes, animals. To put it briefly, every plant has one set of aerial mouths to suck in carbon, and many plants have another set of subterranean mouths as well, to suck up water and mineral constituents.

Have you ever grown mustard and cress in the window on a piece of flannel? If so, that's a capital practical example of the comparative unimportance of soil, except as a means of supplying moisture. You put your flannel in a soup-plate by the dining-room window; you keep it well wet, and you lay the seeds of the cress on top of it. The young plants, being supplied with water by their roots, and with carbon by the air around, have all the little they need below, and grow and thrive in these conditions wonderfully. But if you were to cover them up with an air-tight glass case, so

as to exclude fresh air, they'd shrivel up at once for want of carbon, which is their solid food, as water is their liquid.

The way the plant really eats is little known to gardeners, but very interesting. All over the lower surface of the green leaf lie scattered dozens of tiny mouths or apertures, each of them guarded by two small pursed-up lips which have a ridiculously human appearance when seen through a simple microscope. When the conditions of air and moisture are favourable, these lips open visibly to admit gases; and then the tiny mouths suck in carbonic acid in abundance from the air around them. A series of pipes conveys the gaseous food thus supplied to the upper surface of the leaf, where the sunlight falls full upon it. Now, the cells of the leaf contain a peculiar green digestive material, which I regret to say has no simpler or more cheerful name than chlorophyll; and when the sunlight plays upon this mysterious chlorophyll, it severs the oxygen from the carbon in the carbonic acid, turns the free gas loose upon the atmosphere once more through the tiny mouths, and retains the severed carbon intact in its own tissues. That is the whole process of feeding in plants: they eat carbonic acid, digest it in their leaves, get rid of the oxygen with which it was formerly combined, and keep the carbon stored up for their own purposes.

Life as a whole depends entirely upon this property of chlorophyll; for every atom of organic matter in your body or mine was originally so manufactured by sunlight in the leaves of some plant from which, directly or indirectly, we derive it.

To be sure, in order to make up the various substances which compose their tissues—to build up their wood, their leaves, their fruits, their blossoms—plants require hydrogen, nitrogen, and even small quantities of oxygen as well; but these various materials are sufficiently supplied in the water which is taken up by the roots, and they really contribute very little indeed to the bulk of the tree, which consists for the most part of almost pure carbon. If you were to take a thoroughly dry piece of wood, and then drive off from it by heat these extraneous matters, you would find that the remainder, the pure charcoal, formed the bulk of the weight, the rest being for the most part very light and gaseous. Briefly put, plants are mostly carbon and water, and the carbon which forms their solid part is extracted direct from the air around them.

How does it come about then that a careless world in general,

and more especially the happy-go-lucky race of gardeners and farmers in particular, who have to deal so much with plants in their practical aspect, always attach so great importance to root, soil, manure, minerals, and so little to the real gaseous food stuff of which their crops are, in fact, composed? Why does Hodge, who is so strong on grain and guano, know so absolutely nothing about carbonic acid? That seems at first sight a difficult question to meet. But I think we can meet it with a simple analogy.

Oxygen is an absolute necessary of human life. Even food itself is hardly so important an element in our daily existence; for Succi, Dr. Tanner, the prophet Elijah, and other adventurous souls too numerous to mention, have abundantly shown us that a man can do without food altogether for forty days at a stretch, while he can't do without oxygen for a single minute. Cut off his supply of that life-supporting gas, choke him, or suffocate him, or place him in an atmosphere of pure carbonic acid, or hold his head in a bucket of water, and he dies at once. Yet, except in mines or submarine tunnels, nobody ever takes into account practically this most important factor in human and animal life. We toil for bread, but we ignore the supply of oxygen. And why? Simply because oxygen is universally diffused everywhere. It costs nothing. Only in the Black Hole of Calcutta or in a broken tunnel shaft do men ever begin to find themselves practically short of that life-sustaining gas, and then they know the want of it far sooner and far more sharply than they know the want of food on a shipwrecked raft, or the want of water in the thirsty desert. Yet antiquity never even heard of oxygen. A prime necessary of life passed unnoticed for ages in human history, only because there was abundance of it to be had everywhere.

Now it isn't quite the same, I admit, with the carbonaceous food of plants. Carbonic acid isn't quite so universally distributed as oxygen, nor can every plant always get as much as it wants of it. I shall show by-and-by that a real struggle for food takes place between plants, exactly as it takes place between animals; and that certain plants, like *Oliver Twist* in the workhouse, never practically get enough to eat. Still, carbonic acid is present in very large quantities in the air in most situations, and is freely brought by the wind to all the open spaces which alone man uses for his crops and his gardening. The most important element in the food of plants is thus in effect almost everywhere available, especially from the point of view of the mere practical everyday

human agriculturist. The wind that bloweth where it listeth brings fresh supplies of carbon on its wings with every breeze to the mouths and throats of the greedy and eager plants that long to absorb it.

It is quite otherwise, however, with the soil and its constituents. Land, we all know—or if we don't, it isn't the fault of Mr. George and Mr. A. R. Wallace—land is 'naturally limited in quantity.' Every plant therefore struggles for a foothold in the soil far more fiercely and far more tenaciously than it struggles for its share in the free air of heaven. Your plant is a land-grabber of Rob Roy proclivities; it believes in a fair fight and no favour. A sufficient supply of food it almost takes for granted, if only it can once gain a sufficient ground-space. But other plants are competing with it, tooth and nail (if plants may be permitted by courtesy those metaphorical adjuncts), for their share of the soil, like crofters or socialists; every spare inch of earth is permeated and pervaded with matted fibres; and each is striving to withdraw from each the small modicum of moisture, mineral matter, and manure for which all alike are eagerly battling.

Now, what the plant wants from the soil is three things. First and foremost it wants support; like all the rest of us it must have its *pou sto*, its *pied-à-terre*, its *locus standi*. It can't hang aloft, like Mahomet's coffin, miraculously suspended on an aerial perch between earth and heaven. Secondly, it wants water, and this it can take in, as a rule, only or mainly by means of the rootlets, though there are some peculiar plants which grow (not parasitically) on the branches of trees, and absorb all the moisture they need by pores on their surface. And thirdly, it wants small quantities of nitrogenous matter—in the simpler language of everyday life called manure—as well as of mineral matter—in the simpler language of everyday life called ashes. It is mainly the first of these three, support, that the farmer thinks of when he calculates crops and acreage; for the second, he depends upon rainfall or irrigation; but the third, manure, he can supply artificially; and as manure makes a great deal of incidental difference to some of his crops, especially corn—which requires abundant phosphates—he is apt to over-estimate vastly its importance from a theoretical point of view.

Besides, look at it in another light. Over large areas together, the conditions of air, climate, and rainfall are practically identical. But soil differs greatly from place to place. Here it's black;

there it's yellow; here it's rich loam; there it's boggy mould or sandy gravel. And some soils are better adapted to growing certain plants than others. Rich lowlands and oolites suit the cereals; red marl produces wonderful grazing grass; bare uplands are best for gorse and heather. Hence everything favours for the practical man the mistaken idea that plants and trees grow mainly out of the soil. His own eyes tell him so; he sees them growing, he sees the visible result undeniable before his face; while the real act of feeding off the carbon in the air is wholly unknown to him, being realisable only by the aid of the microscope, aided by the most delicate and difficult chemical analysis.

Nevertheless French chemists have amply proved by actual experiment that plants can grow and produce excellent results without any aid from the soil at all. You have only to suspend the seeds freely in the air by a string, and supply the rootlets of the sprouting seedlings with a little water, containing in solution small quantities of manure-stuffs, and the plants will grow as well as on their native heath, or even better. Indeed, nature has tried the same experiment on a larger scale in many cases, as with the cliff-side plants that root themselves in the naked clefts of granite rocks; the tropical orchids that fasten lightly on the bark of huge forest trees; and the mosses that spread even over the bare face of hard brick walls, with scarcely a chink or cranny in which to fasten their minute rootlets. The insect-eating plants are also interesting examples in their way of the curious means which nature takes for keeping up the manure supply under trying circumstances. These uncanny things are all denizens of loose, peaty soil, where they can root themselves sufficiently for purposes of foothold and drink, but where the water rapidly washes away all animal matter. Under such conditions the cunning sundews and the ruthless pitcher-plants set deceptive honey traps for unsuspecting insects, which they catch and kill, absorbing and using up the protoplasmic contents of their bodies, by way of manure to supply their quota of nitrogenous material.

It is the literal fact, then, that plants really eat and live off carbon, just as truly as sheep eat grass or lions eat antelopes; and that the green leaves are the mouths and stomachs with which they eat and digest it. From this it naturally results that the growth and spread of the leaves must largely depend upon the supply of carbon, as the growth and fatness of sheep depends upon the supply of pasturage. Under most circumstances, to be sure,

there is carbon enough and to spare lying about loose for every one of them; but conditions do now and again occur where we can clearly see the importance of the carbon supply. Water, for example, contains practically much less carbonic acid than atmospheric air, especially when the water is stagnant, and therefore not supplied fresh and fresh to the plant from moment to moment. As a consequence, almost all water-plants have submerged leaves very narrow and waving, while floating plants, like the water-lilies, have them large and round, owing to the absence of competition from other kinds about, which enables them to spread freely in every direction from the central stalk. Moreover, these leaves, lolling on the water as they do, have their mouths on the upper instead of the under surface. But the most remarkable fact of all is that many water plants have two entirely different types of leaves, one submerged and hair-like, the other floating and broad or circular. Our own English water-crowfoot, for example, has the leaves that spring from its stem, below the surface, divided into endless long waving filaments, which look about in the water for the stray particles of carbon; but the moment it reaches the top of its native pond the foliage expands at once into broad lily-like lobes, that recline on the water like oriental beauties, and absorb carbon from the air to their heart's content. The one type may be likened to gills, that similarly catch the dissolved oxygen diffused in water; the other type may be likened to lungs, that drink in the free and open air of heaven.

Equally important to the plant, however, with the supply of carbonic acid, is the supply of sunshine by whose aid to digest it. The carbon alone is no good to the tree if it can't get something which will separate it from the oxygen, locked in close embrace with it. That thing is sunshine. There is nothing, therefore, for which herbs, trees, and shrubs compete more eagerly than for their fair share of solar energy. In their anxiety for this they jostle one another down most mercilessly, in the native condition, grasses struggling up with their hollow stems above the prone low herbs, shrubs overtopping the grasses in turn, and trees once more killing out the overshadowed undershrubs. One must remember that wherever nature has free play, instead of being controlled by the hand of man, dense forest covers every acre of ground where the soil is deep enough; gorse, whins, and heather, or their equivalents grow wherever the forest fails; and herbs can only hold their own in the rare intervals where these domineering

lords of the vegetable creation can find no foothold. Meadows or prairies occur nowhere in nature, except in places where the liability to destructive fires over wide areas together crushes out forest trees, or else where goats, bison, deer, and other large herbivores browse them ceaselessly down in the stage of seedlings. Competition for sunlight is thus even keener perhaps than competition for foodstuffs. Alike on trees, shrubs, and herbs accordingly the arrangement of the leaves is always exactly calculated so as to allow the largest possible horizontal surface, and the greatest exposure of the blade to the open sunshine. In trees this arrangement can often be very well observed, all the leaves being placed at the extremities of the branches, and forming a great dome-shaped or umbrella-shaped mass, every part of which stands an even chance of catching its fair share of carbonic acid and solar energy.

The shapes of the leaves themselves are also largely due to the same cause, every leaf being so designed in form and outline as to interfere as little as possible with the other leaves on the same stem, as regards supply both of light and of carbonaceous foodstuffs. It is only in rare cases, like that of the water-lily, that perfectly round leaves occur, because the conditions are seldom equal all round, and the incidence of light and the supply of carbon are seldom unlimited. But wherever leaves rise free and solitary into the air, without mutual interference, they are always circular, as may be well seen in the common nasturtium and the English pennywort. On the other hand, among dense hedgerows and thickets, where the silent, invisible struggle for life is very fierce indeed, and where sunlight and carbonic acid are intercepted by a thousand competing mouths and arms, the prevailing types of leaf are extremely cut up and minutely subdivided into small lace-like fragments. The plant in such cases can't afford material to fill up the interstices between the veins and ribs which determine its underlying architectural structure. Often indeed species which grow under these hard conditions produce leaves which are, as it were, but skeleton representatives of their large and well filled-out compeers in the open meadows.

It is only by bearing vividly in mind this ceaseless and noiseless struggle between plants for their gaseous food and the sunshine which enables them to digest it, that we can ever fully understand the varying forms and habits of the vegetable kingdom. To most people, no doubt, it sounds like pure metaphor to talk of

an internecine struggle between rooted beings which cannot budge one inch from their places, nor fight with horns, hoofs, or teeth, nor devour one another bodily, nor tread one another down with ruthless footsteps. But that is only because we habitually forget that competition is just as really a struggle for life as open warfare. The men who try against one another for a clerkship in the City, or a post in a gang of builder's workmen, are just as surely taking away bread and butter out of their fellows' mouths for their own advantage, as if they fought for it openly with fists or six-shooters. The white man who encloses the hunting grounds of the Indian, and plants them with corn, is just as surely dooming that Indian to death as if he scalped or tomahawked him. And so too with the unconscious warfare of plants. The daisy or the plantain that spreads its rosette of leaves flat against the ground is just as truly monopolising a definite space of land as the noble owner of a Highland deer forest. No blade of grass can spring beneath the shadow of those tightly pressed little mats of foliage; no fragment of carbon, no ray of sunshine can ever penetrate below that close fence of living greenstuff.

Plants, in fact, compete with one another all round for everything they stand in need of. They compete for their food—carbonic acid. They compete for their energy—their fair share of sunlight. They compete for water, and their foothold in the soil. They compete for the favours of the insects that fertilise their flowers. They compete for the good services of the birds or mammals that disseminate their seeds in proper spots for germination. And how real this competition is we can see in a moment, if we think of the difficulties of human cultivation. There, weeds are always battling manfully with our crops or our flowers for mastery over the field or garden. We are obliged to root up with ceaseless toil these intrusive competitors, if we wish to enjoy the kindly fruits of the earth in due season. When we leave a garden to itself for a few short years, we realise at once what effect the competition of hardy natives has upon our carefully tended and unstable exotics. In a very brief time the dahlias and phloxes and lilies have all disappeared, and in their place the coarse-growing docks and nettles and thistles have raised their heads aloft to monopolise air and space and sunshine.

Exactly the same struggle is always taking place in the fields and woods and moors around us, and especially in the spots made over to pure nature. There, the greenwood tree raises its huge

umbrella of foliage to the skies, and allows hardly a ray of sunlight to struggle through to the low woodland vegetation of orchid or wintergreen underneath. Where the soil is not deep enough for trees to root securely, bushes and heathers overgrow the ground, and compete with their bell-shaped blossoms for the coveted favour of bees and butterflies. And in open glades, where for some reason or other the forest fails, tall grasses and other aspiring herbs run up apace towards the free air of heaven. Elsewhere, creepers struggle up to the sun over the stems and branches of stronger bushes or trees, which they often choke and starve by monopolising at last all the available carbon and sunlight. And so throughout; the struggle for life goes on just as ceaselessly and truly among these unconscious combatants as among the lions and tigers of the tropical jungle, or among the human serfs of the overstocked market.

An ounce of example, they say, is worth a pound of precept. So a single concrete case of a fierce vegetable campaign now actually in progress over all Northern Europe may help to make my meaning a trifle clearer. Till very lately the forests of the north were largely composed in places of the light and airy silver birches. But with the gradual amelioration of the climate of our continent, which has been going on for several centuries, the beech, a more southern type of tree, has begun to spread slowly though surely northward. Now, beeches are greedy trees, of very dense and compact foliage; nothing else can grow beneath their thick shade, where once they have gained a foothold; and the seedlings of the silver birch stand no chance at all in the struggle for life against the serried leaves of their formidable rivals. The beech literally eats them out of house and home; and the consequence is that the thick and ruthless southern tree is at this very moment gradually superseding over vast tracts of country its more graceful and beautiful, but far less voracious competitor.

GRASSE:

ITS PERFUMES AND PICTURES.

'GUEUSE PARFUMÉE,' or scented slut, is the nickname given to Grasse by the most eminent of its bishops. Two centuries have passed since then, and Grasse, though no longer a 'Gueuse,' has still an undisputed right to the title of the scented.

It is comforting in these days of chemical surprises, when bright colours and exquisite flavours are extracted from the most repulsive substances, to know that the wares of the perfumer do still come from the flowers whose name they bear. A visit to Grasse must remove all doubt from the mind of the most sceptical. Flowers are the chief produce of the soil and the mainstay of the population. They are grown on every available patch of ground. Violets carpet the terraces under the olive-trees, while on other terraces grows the orange-tree. That 'busy plant' keeps its owner as busy as the poet fancied it was itself, for the leaves have to be carefully syringed and wiped every now and again to keep it free from blight.

Out in the open country there are fields of jonquil, and of jessamine, and of the muscadine rose, that Rose of Provence, which excels all other roses in fragrance. But the rose and the jessamine lose much of their gracefulness in this field culture. No straggling sprays are allowed to wander at their own sweet will; they are all caught and pinned down, bent over in hoops close to the ground.

There is no scope left the flowers for wasting 'their sweetness on the desert air' in this region. Every whiff of scent has its money value, and all through the flowering season the stills of the seventy perfumers which the town can boast are busy extracting and bottling up this sweetness for the London and Paris markets. From earliest dawn picturesque figures, with huge discs of straw the size of cartwheels on their heads, and skirts whose roseate hue makes the roses themselves look dingy, are picking away for bare life in the flower fields. Of the violet gatherers nothing is to be seen save the hats. They look like a row of targets set up for archery practice. It is only on closer inspection that you find a figure crouching on all fours picking hard behind the shelter of her head-gear. As the flowers are

picked they are carried in baskets into the town. The violets refuse to give up their scent, like the other flowers, to distillation. Slabs of slate set in wooden frames are spread thick with hog's lard to receive them. On this bed they are scattered, and the slates are then stacked one above the other like the shelves of a cabinet. The flowers must be renewed three times a day, all through the flowering season. By that time the lard is permeated with the scent which can then be withdrawn from it into spirit. The orange blossom is the chief source of wealth in the district. The season lasts a month, and during that time flower-picking is the business of life on the farms. So strong is the scent that it sometimes overpowers the pickers, and brings on prolonged fainting fits. The famous Neroly is the concentrated essence of the orange flower. A kilogramme of blossom yields one gramme or a thousandth part of its weight in Neroly, which is the chief ingredient in eau-de-Cologne. Sixty thousand francs' worth of Neroly go to Cologne from Grasse yearly. To meet this demand two hundred thousand kilos of blossoms are used up. Much of the so-called attar of roses is made here also, and finds its way from Grasse to Paris *via* Constantinople, where it is transferred to the familiar gilt glass bottles that seem to certify its Eastern origin. The productions of Grasse are the *premières matières* or raw materials of perfume. They are much manipulated in Paris before they reach the public, and the favourite bouquets are really produced by a cunning mixture of the essences of many flowers. As the scent of flowers must be extracted where they grow, Grasse has a long lease of the monopoly of the perfume trade, which it has enjoyed ever since Catherine de' Medici brought the taste for perfumes and poisons from her native Italy. This taste reached its height under Louis Quinze, when Versailles was known as the 'Cour parfumée,' and etiquette required that everyone pretending to fashion must have a different scent every day. Scents were one of the great extravagances of the age, and it is stated that the Pompadour spent on perfumes five hundred thousand francs a year.

Grasse has other attractions to boast of besides the flowers and the scenery. In an old-fashioned house near the Cour there are some pictures which are well worth a pilgrimage to visit. These are some masterpieces of Fragonard, who was a native of Grasse. He went to Paris and studied under Chardin, Vanloo, and Boucher. With Boucher he soon became a favourite,

because he could work fifteen hours a day without fatigue. Fragonard gained the Prix de Rome and set out to study the great masters. 'If you take them seriously, you are done for,' was Boucher's parting warning, and Fragonard acted upon it. He said that Raphael and Michael Angelo frightened him. So he went about a great deal, and saw a great deal of Italian life, but studied not at all. Thus he returned to Paris with his style unaltered. He was a Frenchman to the backbone, and threw himself heart and soul into all the pleasures of a frivolous age, that made the joys of life the chief end of existence. He gained admission to the Academy by one serious effort, which called forth a ponderous *éloge* from Diderot. But he found a shorter cut to fame by becoming the favoured lover of the celebrated *danseuse* Guimard. This *Squelette des Graces*, so called because she was ugly, black, and thin, had all the *beau monde* of Paris sighing at her feet. From among them she singled out Fragonard. He painted her, as the dancing Muse, for her new theatre, which she called the Temple of Terpsichore. The portrait gave her great delight, and she invited friends to a private view. Meanwhile the lovers had had a quarrel, and Fragonard, out of pique, had effaced the smile of the Muse, and replaced it by the head of a Fury, with a striking likeness to the original. It was this startling caricature that Guimard found herself facing when the doors were thrown open and the work of Fragonard revealed. Rage at the mortifying surprise made the likeness more striking, and the friends who came to admire could not restrain a laugh. The breach thus made was too wide to be healed, and the painter was discarded. But it mattered little to him now, for he had become the fashion. No boudoir of the period was complete without some work from his brush. His pictures were eagerly competed for, and his prices were absurdly high. When he was at the zenith of his fame, the Dubarry commissioned from him the pictures now at Grasse, for the decoration of a salon in her château at Luciennes. Fragonard painted them when on a visit to his native town. There are four large canvases to cover the walls and smaller pieces to put over the doors. The theme, as usual, is love. They set forth the four stages of a romance, said to be taken from the life of Louis Quinze. The figures are set in a garden scene, with the picturesque adjuncts of fountains and balustrades. The colouring is bright, the figures very graceful, and the execution full of freedom and vigour. The storm of the

Revolution burst before the pictures were sent home, and they still hang in the house where they were painted, and from which they have never been removed. Thus the 'ill wind' that destroyed art-treasures all over France was the means of preserving those of Grasse.

Other pictures there are in the town too, which, though of small merit in point of art, are dear to all lovers of letters from having been painted under the very eyes of Goethe, when a boy, in his father's house at Frankfort. The French occupation of Frankfort made a great impression on the poet's mind. It was his first glimpse of the world outside his quiet German home, and the vivid picture he has drawn oft bears the stamp of truth in its sharply touched-in lines. The free imperial city was accustomed to the sight of soldiers passing through to the seat of war. But on New Year's day, 1759, it was surprised by the arrival of a French army, which did not pass through but coolly planted itself in the town by means of billeting itself on the citizens. Goethe's father had just finished his new and handsome house, and to his extreme disgust the French singled it out as the headquarters of the King's lieutenant. This dignitary had to keep the peace between the soldiers and the citizens, and decide all quarrels between them. Then began stirring times for the children of the house; the constant coming and going of both parties kept their home buzzing like a beehive. The relations between the master of the house and his distinguished guest were very strained. Their father, though he spoke French well, hated the nation, and he would hold no communication with the intruder except through an interpreter, and the whole household were kept on tenter-hooks to avert the flare-up which they felt would come from a personal encounter with the Count. Their mother took a different line. Her policy was one of conciliation. In mature middle age she learnt French, that she might talk to the Count in his own language. As for the children, they gathered a daily harvest of dainties from the Count's dessert. If they could escape their father's eye they devoured these in safety, all except the ices which the anxious mother intercepted. Such things had never been seen in simple Frankfort before, and she felt sure that no human stomach could digest them. The Count himself was an interesting study for young Goethe. He was a tall, dark, dignified man, more like a Spaniard than a Frenchman, giving a witty turn to his decisions in the quarrels daily brought before him, and yet

subject to fits of gloom during which he would see no one, and which gave occasion to endless surmises. A whisper ran that a dark deed done in a moment of passion had marred his whole life and prospects. This dark mysterious Count de Thoranne was a great lover of art. He found painting was cheap at Frankfort, and he resolved to have pictures painted for the walls of the family mansion at Grasse, sent home for the measurements of the walls, and then set the best artists in Frankfort to work upon the canvas. A room in the house was set aside for the artists. There they painted busily, and Goethe and the Count seemed to have passed most of their time there too in looking on. Each of these artists had his speciality. One excelled in Dutch work and could do fruit and flowers to perfection. The forte of another was sunny Rhine scenery. A third went in for Rembrandt effects, and gloried in Resurrection miracles and flaming villages and mills. Seekatz, the most eminent among them, shone in rural life. His old people and children were lifelike, because they were done from life, but his young men were far too thin, and his young women just as much too fat. The reason of this was that his wife, who was stout and middle-aged, insisted on sitting as his model. When the Count found out the special gift of each artist, the bright idea struck him that the pictures would be vastly improved if each one painted in them what he could do best. So he had cattle painted into a landscape finished by another hand. A third was employed to put in sheep, which he did so lavishly that the flock flowed over the edge. The figure-painter was then told to add some travellers and a few shepherds; thus the piece became so crowded with living objects that they seemed to be choking for want of air even in the open country. This led to deadly quarrels among the painters, as each one accused the others of spoiling his work. At length this strange patchwork was finished and sent home to Grasse, where it still decorates one of the large old-fashioned houses on the Place des Aires in the centre of the town.

Near this historic house there is another which contains a salon decorated and furnished in the best taste of the style of Louis Quinze. This was the boudoir of Louise, Marquise de Cabris, one of that strange family of Mirabeau who gave the world so much to talk about. In this satin-lined nest perhaps she was surprised by the sudden visit of her scapegrace brother Honoré. He found the dulness of Manosque, whither he had been consigned by *lettre de cachet*, so intolerable, that he came down to Grasse to seek a

little excitement. In a few days the whole town was in a ferment, and the brother and sister found themselves credited with an outrage on public decency of which, for once, they were guiltless. A libel on the ladies of Grasse placarded the walls. A gentleman of the neighbourhood, M. de Mouans, openly said what every one thought, that this was the work of the dare-devil Mirabeaus. In revenge for this Mirabeau fell upon him, when he met him unprotected on the road, and beat him nearly to death, with his sister looking on. A lawsuit followed in which many scandals came out; it was found that the Marquis de Cabris and not his wife was the author of the squibs which had raised this storm in a tea-cup, whose consequences were to be wider than any of those concerned in it could imagine. For it was for his share in this affair that the nobles turned their backs on Mirabeau when he tried to secure their votes at Aix. This drove him to open the clothshop which qualified him as a deputy of the Tiers État, and made him the mouthpiece of the Revolution. On the same Place des Aires there stood formerly the palace of a queen, who held a front place in the history of her time. Queen Jeanne of Naples came to Grasse to avoid the revengers of her first husband, of whose death she was openly accused. In Provence she made herself popular, scattering her bounties with a lavish hand, gave a water conduit to one commune and a charter to another, freed one district from the tyranny of bandits and another from the tyranny of bishops, and conferred on the peasants of the Esterel the freedom of their forest. A fragment of the kitchen-stair is all that is left to show that this fascinating woman for whom the troubadours sang and Giotto painted, the Queen who won the adoration of Petrarch, the pupil of Boccaccio, and the bugbear of St. Catherine of Siena, once held her court in Grasse.

We must not leave Grasse without recalling the memory of Antoine Godeau, the greatest of her bishops. Godeau was drawn from the depths of provincial life by Conrart, who brought him to Paris to that literary gathering in his house in the Rue St. Martin which was denounced to Richelieu as a secret society. The Cardinal took away its secrecy, and gave it importance by conferring on it the royal approval. He thus founded the Academy. Godeau was the darling of the Hôtel Rambouillet, where he was known as the 'nain de Mademoiselle Julie.' His prose was the model of style. The highest praise that could be given to literary work was to call it 'du Godeau.' He took orders at the mature age of

thirty-five, in hope of preferment, and the Cardinal gave him the see of Grasse. For a short time it was united with Vence, but this union was so unpopular that Godeau resigned Grasse, and ended his days at Vence. Here he died from a fit of apoplexy as he was singing the *Tenebræ* before the altar in Passion Week.

Apart from association, Grasse has natural charms that win every heart. The climate and the scenery are both superb. But for the bigotry of one of the natives, Grasse would long ago have held the place of Cannes as a winter resort. Lord Brougham would have settled here, but was refused the property he wished to buy on the grotesque ground that he was a Protestant. He went on to Cannes, and became a pillar of the Church in the colony which he there founded. The great variety of walks and drives round Grasse prevents life from being monotonous. Antibes, with Vauban's fort, Vence with its Roman remains, Gourdon perched high on its rocky pinnacle above the Loup where the caves and clefts still echo the groans of hunted Huguenots, Tourette the stronghold of the Saracens, its rocky platform literally covered with aloes, are all within easy range, and offer tempting subjects for canvas or camera; while the geologist and botanist may find at every step rare treasures to serve as mementos of their rambles in this sunny land of flowers.

A FLASH IN THE PAN.

It is not everybody who knows what a Minor Canon is, or what his duties are; so, for the sake of the uninformed, let me say at once that his chief duty is to take his turn in reading, that is, in monotoning and singing the daily services in a Cathedral. Such is my duty. I am a Minor Canon of the Cathedral Church of Marchbury. I occupy a house within the Cathedral Close, and thus enjoy the privilege of passing my days 'far from the madding crowd.' The life is uneventful enough: little happens from year's end to year's end to vary the humdrum of existence; in fact, nothing more exciting than a garden party at the Bishop's or a dinner at the Deanery, or tea at the Archdeacon's. Even these superior 'functions' cause but a slight and transient ruffle upon the calm flow of life's stream.

For many years, as a Minor Canon, I have breathed this serene and placid atmosphere of the Close. Often have I wondered if I should live all my life thus; or whether, some day or other, something would startle me, like a bolt from the blue, and I should find myself plunged, on a sudden, into the midst of the most exciting events. For many years, year after year and month after month, I have regularly taken my 'turn' in singing the services, and nothing particularly remarkable has ever happened to me—until yesterday: and yesterday something did happen.

It was Monday, and in the afternoon, as I was walking along the High Street of Marchbury, I was met by a distinguished-looking person, whom I had observed at the services in the Cathedral on the previous day. Now it chanced, on that Sunday, that I was singing the service. Properly speaking, it was not my turn; but, as my brother Minor Canons were either away from Marchbury, or ill in bed, I was the only one left to perform the necessary duty. The distinguished-looking person was a tall, big man, with a round fat face and small features. His eyes, his hair and moustache (his face was bare but for a small moustache) were quite black, and he had a very pleasant and genial expression. He wore a tall hat, set rather jauntily on his head, and he was dressed in black with a long frock coat, buttoned across the chest and fitting him close to the body. As he came, with a half saunter, half swagger, along the street, I knew him again at once by his

appearance; and, as he came nearer, I saw from his manner that he was intending to stop and speak to me. For he slightly raised his hat, and, in a soft, melodious voice, with a colonial 'twang,' which was far from being disagreeable, and which, indeed, to my ear gave a certain additional interest to his remarks, he saluted me with 'Good day, sir!'

'Good day,' I answered, with just a little reserve in my tone.

'I hope, sir,' he began, 'you will excuse my stopping you in the street, but I wish to tell you how very much I enjoyed the music at your Cathedral yesterday. I am an Australasian, sir, and we have no such music in my country.'

'I suppose not,' I said.

'No, sir,' he went on, 'nothing nearly so fine. I am very fond of music, and as my business brought me in this direction, I thought I would stop at your city and take the opportunity of paying a visit to your grand Cathedral. And I am delighted I came: so pleased, indeed, that I should like to leave some memorial of my visit behind me. I should like, sir, to do something for your choir.'

'I am sure it is very kind of you,' I replied.

'Yes, I should certainly be glad if you could suggest to me something I might do in this way. As regards money, I may say that I have plenty of it. I am the owner of a most valuable property. My business relations extend throughout the world, and if I am as fortunate in the projects of the future as I have been in the past, I shall probably one day achieve the proud position of being the richest man in the world.'

I did not like to undertake, myself, the responsibility of advising or suggesting, so I simply said:

'I cannot venture to say, offhand, what would be the most acceptable way of showing your great kindness and generosity: but I should certainly recommend you to put yourself in communication with the Dean.'

'Thank you, sir,' said my Australian friend, 'I will do so. And now, sir,' he continued, 'let me say how much I admire your voice. It is, without exception, the very finest and clearest voice I have ever heard.'

'Really,' I answered, quite overcome with such unqualified praise, 'really it is very good of you to say so.'

'Ah! but I feel it, my dear sir. I have been round the world; from Sydney to Frisco, across the continent of America (he called it Amerriker) to New York city; then on to England, and

to-morrow I shall leave your city to continue my travels. But in all my experience I have never heard so grand a voice as your own.'

This and a great deal more he said in the same strain, which modesty forbids me to reproduce.

Now I am not without some knowledge of the world outside the Close of Marchbury Cathedral, and I could not listen to such a 'flattering tale' without having my suspicions aroused. Who and what is this man? thought I. I looked at him narrowly. At first the thought flashed across me that he might be a 'swell mobsman.' But no; his face was too good for that: besides, no man with that huge frame, that personality so marked and so easily recognisable, could be a swindler: he could not escape detection a single hour. I dismissed the ungenerous thought. Perhaps he is rich, as he says. We do hear of munificent donations by benevolent millionaires now and then. What if this Australian, attracted by the glories of the old Cathedral, should now appear, as a *deus ex machina*, to re-endow the choir, or to found a Musical Professoriate in connection with the choir, appointing me the first occupant of the professorial chair?

These thoughts flashed across my mind in the momentary pause of his fluent tongue.

'As for yourself, sir,' he began again, 'I have something to propose, which I trust may not prove unwelcome. But the public street is hardly a suitable place to discuss my proposal. May I call upon you this evening at your house in the Close? I know which it is, for I happened to see you go into it yesterday after the morning service.'

'I shall be very pleased to see you,' I replied. 'We are going out to dinner this evening; but I shall be at home and disengaged till about seven.'

'Thank you very much. Then I shall do myself the pleasure of calling upon you about six o'clock. Till then, farewell!' A graceful wave of the hand, and my unknown friend had disappeared round the corner of the street.

Now at last, I thought, something is going to happen in my uneventful life—something to break the monotony of existence. Coming events cast their shadows before. The shadow had been cast, and a very solid and substantial shadow, too—over six feet high, and proportionately broad and thick. I had succeeded, it was evident, in attracting the notice of some great Australian millionaire. Of course, he must have inquired my name; he could get that from any of the Cathedral vergers; and, as he said,

he had observed whereabouts in the Close I lived. But I was not to see him again till six o'clock, and there were three good hours to wait. I recalled all that happened on the Sunday. It seemed as if some special providence was acting in my favour. It was due to the illness and absence of my colleagues that I had had the good fortune to officiate. Surely this was providential, and I am ashamed to say that I was, in one way, realising the truth of the famous maxim of La Rochefoucauld, in deriving a secret satisfaction from the misfortunes of my friends. Still, it was remarkable that it should happen thus. And it was undoubtedly true that on that particular Sunday I was in excellent voice; and then the vanity, which is natural to all men, asserted itself in me, and I found myself only too ready to believe that my voice was the 'finest and clearest' ever heard. Somebody's must be the finest, and why not mine? My mysterious friend, whatever else he might be, was most certainly a man of good taste and judgment; that could not be denied. And then, as he had said, he was rich. 'Plenty of money' he said he had. What is he coming to see me for? I wondered. I spent the rest of the afternoon in making the wildest surmises. I was castle-building in Spain at a furious rate. At one time I imagined that this faithful son of the Church—as he appeared to me—was going to build and endow a grand Cathedral in Australia, on condition that I should be appointed Dean at a yearly stipend of—say ten thousand pounds. At another time, I imagined him asking me to become his private chaplain at about the same remuneration. Again I thought he might offer to educate my three boys at his own expense, provided that special attention should be given to the development of their natural musical genius. Or perhaps, I said to myself, he will beg me to accept a sum of money—I never thought of it as less than a thousand pounds—as a slight recognition of, and tribute to, my remarkable vocal ability. I confess I always came back to this last conjecture, as the most probable; the others seemed rather wild in their fancifulness. I felt there were many practical objections in the way of realising these, but it seemed so easy and natural that he should make me a present from his boundless wealth, that my imagination dwelt upon it with increasing satisfaction.

I took a long lonely walk into the country to correct these ridiculous fancies and to steady my mind; and when I reached home, and had refreshed myself with a quiet cup of afternoon tea, I felt I was morally and physically prepared for my interview with the opulent stranger.

Punctually as the Cathedral clock struck six, there was a ring at the visitors' bell; in a moment or two my unknown friend was shown into the drawing-room, which he entered with the easy air of a man of the world. I noticed he was carrying a small black bag.

'How do you do again, Mr. Dale?' he said as though we were old acquaintances; 'you see I have come sharp to my time.'

'Yes,' I answered, 'and I am pleased to see you; do sit down.' He sank into my best arm-chair, and placed his bag on the floor beside him.

'Since we met in the afternoon,' he said, 'I have written a letter to your Dean, expressing the great pleasure I felt in listening to your choir; and at the same time I enclosed a five-pound note, which I begged him to divide among the choir-boys and men, from Alexander Poulter, Esq., of Poulter's Pills. You have of course heard of the world-renowned Poulter's Pills. I am Poulter.'

Poulter of Poulter's Pills! My heart sank within me! A five-pound note! My airy castles were tottering!

'I also sent him a couple of hundred of my pamphlets which I said I trusted he would be so kind as to distribute in the Close.'

I was aghast!

'And now, with regard to the special object of my call, Mr. Dale. If you will allow me to say so, you are not making the most of that grand voice of yours; you are hidden under an ecclesiastical bushel here—lost to the world. You are wasting your vocal strength and sweetness on the desert air, so to speak. Why—if I may hazard a guess—I don't suppose you make five hundred a year here, at the outside?'

I could say nothing.

'Well, now, I can put you into the way of making at least three or four times as much as that. Listen! I am Alexander Poulter of Poulter's Pills. I have a proposal to make to you; the scheme is bound to succeed, but I want your help. Accept my proposal and your fortune's made. Did you ever hear Moody and Sankey?' he asked abruptly.

It seemed an eccentric query, and in its jerky disjointedness reminded me of Alice in Wonderland. I murmured that I had had that advantage.

'So much the better,' he said, with evident satisfaction; and he lifted his bag on to his knees.

I was beginning to get rather nervous. What if this man before me were an escaped lunatic! What if he carried some

deadly weapon in that bag! At any rate I would be careful not to contradict him, but agree with him in everything. I had always understood that this was the safest thing for anyone to do who might find himself *vis-à-vis* with a roving idiot.

'So much the better,' he repeated; 'it will save me some risk of not making myself understood. You are now in a position to grasp my scheme. Moody and Sankey were, I believe, eminently successful in their line, and it seems to me not unreasonable to expect that a similar success will result from applying the same method in my business. We must advertise. Famous as Poulter's Pills are, their fame depends upon keeping up a system of enterprising advertisement. We have tried for a time, as an experiment, the effect of not advertising, relying upon a well-established reputation; but we found out the mistake. Advertise we must.'

The man is an idiot, thought I; he is now fairly carried away with his particular mania. Will it last long? Shall I ring?

'Novelty, my dear sir,' he went on, 'is the rule of the day; and there must be novelty in advertising, as in everything else, to catch the public interest. So I intend to go on a tour, lecturing on the merits of Poulter's Pills, in all the principal halls of all the principal towns all over the world. But I have been delayed in carrying out my idea till I could associate myself with a gentleman, such as yourself. Will you join me? I should be the Moody of the tour; you would be its Sankey. I would speak my patter, and you would intersperse my orations with melodious ballads bearing upon the virtues of Poulter's Pills. The ballads are all ready!'

So saying, he opened that bag and drew forth from its recesses nothing more alarming than a thick roll of manuscript music.

'The verses are my own,' he said, with a little touch of pride; 'and as for the music, I thought it better to make use of popular melodies, so as to enable an audience to join in the chorus. See, here is one of the ballads: "Darling, I am better now;" it describes the woes of a fond lover, or rather his physical ailments, until he went through a course of Poulter. Here's another: "I'm ninety-five! I'm ninety-five!" You catch the drift of that, of course—a healthy old age secured by taking Poulter's Pills. Ah! what's this? "Little sister's last request." I fancy the idea of that is to beg the family never to be without Poulter's Pills. Here again: "Then you'll remember me!" I'm afraid that title is not original; never mind, the song is. And here is——

but there are many more, and I won't detain you with them now.' He saw, perhaps, I was getting impatient. Thank Heaven, however, he was no escaped lunatic! I was safe!

'Well, now, my dear Mr. Dale, you see what my plan is. What do you say? Don't reject it because it appears ridiculous or extravagant: it is just what is ridiculous and extravagant which succeeds in advertising. And, my word for it, there's money in it, sir! I don't ask you to invest in the concern, I don't ask you to give security for any sum of money, if you join me; what I want you to do is, simply, to help me with your melodious voice, in the way I have explained. I can offer you thirty pounds a week to begin with, and then, if my project succeeds, as I am sure it will, you shall have forty pounds. We shall travel all over the country with a four-in-hand, with a brass band playing on the top, whilst you and I will be in front on the box. Imagine what a stir we shall make everywhere! Picture the huge crowds who will flock to our lectures! Come, what do you say?'

I could say nothing. Disappointment and disgust, rage and resentment, distracted my mind. This was the end of all my brilliant hopes! I saw myself in imagination being driven about the streets of provincial towns in the day, and sitting behind a harmonium singing abominable ballads to its lugubrious accompaniment at night. The thought was too much for me. By a great effort I managed to stammer a few words.

'Mr. Poulter,' said I, 'I took you this afternoon for a disinterested and philanthropic millionaire; you take me for—something different from what I am. We have both made mistakes. In a word, it is impossible for me to accept your offer!'

'Is that final?' asked Poulter.

'Certainly,' said I.

Poulter gathered his manuscripts together and replaced them in the bag, and got up to leave the room.

'Good evening, Mr. Dale,' he said mournfully, as I opened the door of the room. 'Good evening'—he kept on talking till he was fairly out of the house; 'mark my words, you'll be sorry—very sorry—one day that you did not fall in with my scheme. Offers like mine don't come every day, and you will one day regret having refused it.'

With these words he left the house.

I had little appetite for my dinner that evening.

ACROSS THE ATLANTIC, 'STEERAGE'

SOME nine months ago, after a lengthy yacht-cruise, I had to find my way home to London from the West Indies, and was told that it was both quicker and cheaper to go *viâ* New York than direct; moreover, having never been in the States, I was glad of the opportunity of passing a few days in their 'boss' city. It doesn't matter to you, my readers, whether I gambled, or how it happened, but the fact is, that I landed at Brooklyn with only two coins in my possession—excellent coins, however, as far as they went, being each a gold *plaque* of \$20 (known as the double-eagle, of the same value as the well-known 'cart-wheels' of Monte Carlo, *i.e.* 4*l.* apiece). Having sent off my baggage by express wagon to an hotel to which I had been recommended, where I could get a bedroom for a dollar a day, I started to walk across the famous bridge and ponder over my situation. Fares to England were—cabin 12*l.* 10*s.* (the lowest), intermediate 7*l.* 10*s.*, steerage 4*l.*; which last includes railway fare from Liverpool to London, while the others do not. It was Tuesday afternoon, and the steamer-days for England are Wednesday and Saturday; 8 A.M. was the hour fixed for the following morning, but all the boats advertised were inferior, and I had a fancy for a 'greyhound.' Still, if I were to sail the next morning, I should be able to revenge myself on those Americans who do London in three days, by doing New York in three hours. Suppose I were to go 'intermediate,' I should have just ten shillings to spend that night, and nothing at all for drinks and stewards, &c., on the passage, besides being landed at Liverpool penniless; and, after all, 'intermediate' was merely a verbal cloak for 'second class,' and if one does not travel first class, it is generally more amusing to travel third than second. Should I wire home for credit? It would be expensive, and I had lately been wasting more money than I could well afford. Well, *manet sors tertia*, 'steerage.'

By this time I was about halfway across the river, and in full view of the magnificent panorama of the city, and as I looked at it in the dusky glow of a wintry sunset, I felt it would be 'real mean' to do New York in three hours; I would be economical—I would go home 'steerage' by the big 'City of Rome' advertised to

sail on Saturday; the food and accommodation would probably be as good as on the yacht 'Alerte,' and I was used to roughing it at sea. This would leave me 4*l.*, which would be ample for half a week, and I should not have to pay the fare from Liverpool to London. The momentous question being settled, I decided without any hesitation that the next thing I had to do was to get a square meal.

I don't know if it is that London has become very American of late, but I found New York far more English than I had been led to expect; and one false impression of mine was very quickly corrected. I had always been given to understand that if you were to offer a gratuity to an American waiter, he would think you meant to insult him. On the contrary, I certainly thought my first waiter meant to insult me when he saw me pick up all the change of my twenty-dollar bit. So far from asking me to remember him, he looked as though he reckoned he didn't want to see me again anyhow; my next waiter I interviewed on the subject, and found that in this respect, as in so many others, the New Yorker's custom was now English—quite English.

On Wednesday morning I found my way to a shipping-agent in the Bowery. He informed me that the 'City of Rome' would not be sailing on Saturday, as, owing to a Liverpool dock-strike, she had not yet left England. He calculated the Ocean boat was about the best vessel sailing that week-end, and guessed I had better take a passage by the well-known 'Foam;' he also quoted the proud boast of the Ocean Company, that during the fifty years they had been running they had never lost a single passenger through accident. In return for my second *plaque* he gave me a ticket through to London, which I was to exchange at the quay. Printed on this I was startled to notice that steerage passengers had to provide themselves with bedding and all eating utensils, but was relieved when I read on that all these commodities were to be purchased from the Company's agent for \$2.50, or 10*s.* The boat was to sail at 5.30 on Saturday morning, and I concluded it would be a pleasant economy to sleep on board on Friday night. So on Friday (it was Good Friday) afternoon I paid my hotel bill, including that great American extravagance, a cab to take my things down to the boat; but on arrival at the quay, I was shocked to discover that there was no ship to be seen. Inquiring at the office, they could only tell me that the 'Foam' was not in yet, and so it was impossible to say when she would sail out, but

certainly not before Tuesday. Meantime, they would look after my baggage for me, and I should find it in my cabin, if I would give them the number. It took a long time to persuade them that I was going in the steerage; one man, who had grown old in the service of the Company, reckoned he had never till that day seen a 'steerage' drive down in a cab. Had I booked my passage? If so, the Company would put me up at their hotel opposite until I sailed. This was good news, as my dollars were now few indeed; and a moment afterwards the message arrived that the 'Foam' had at last been signalled. The hotel people were very hospitable, and, I am sure, treated me much better than was necessary; here I discovered several people in a similar predicament to myself, but I found out that they were mostly intermediate passengers, and that the steerage folk had been that morning transferred to a vessel of another Line, which was sailing at the proper time. We did not get off until 3 P.M. on Tuesday, and but for another company giving us some of their steerage passengers in the same way, we should have had scarcely any; as it was, we had only 200, and the 'Foam' can carry four times that number; consequently, there was plenty of room for us in the fore-end of the ship, and the aft-steerage accommodation, which I was informed was the larger, but did not see, was not used.

When I first got on board, and went to see what was before me, I must own to having been somewhat repelled at the prospect. Imagine deep down in the very bottom (as it seemed) of the vessel a barn-like apartment, dimly lighted and badly ventilated, with a moist breath of carbohic acid, about 60 feet long, tapering to a point at one end, and perhaps 20 feet wide at the other. In each of the wooden side walls rough doors 15 feet apart. These lead into the sleeping-pens, each lit by a porthole, which is too near the water to be ever opened except in harbour, and which is completely submerged when the vessel lays over or rolls. The pens are about 15 feet by 12 feet; a passage 2 feet wide runs down the middle from the door to the port, on each side of which are two deep shelves, one 5 feet and the other a few inches from the floor; each of these shelves is divided out into four divisions by planks some 8 inches high, so that each pen contains sixteen bunks about 6 feet 6 inches by 2 feet 9 inches. These are the single men's quarters, and communicating with them is a somewhat similar but wider place, further aft, reserved for females and married men; this looked even a more detestable region than the other, as it lacked alto-

gether the modicum of air and light that came down the companion-ladder into the main portion.

The 'Foam' has no hurricane-deck, and, for the benefit of any readers who may not have been on board a Liner, I will describe her a little more fully. There are three decks, known as the upper, main, and lower. The upper deck is the deck one sees and walks on—what an unnautical person means when he speaks of *the* deck. The main deck, below this, is taken up with the saloon and cabins aft, with the intermediate cabins amidships, unpleasantly close to the engines, and forward with the sailors' quarters or fo'c's'le, and the various small cabins sacred to the quarter-masters, bosuns, carpenters, &c., and their respective messes. The only part of the main deck available to be walked on is a long passage at each side of the vessel, about 10 feet wide, extending the whole way from the saloon to the fo'c's'le. Further below, on the lower deck, live the steerage passengers, as already described, fore and aft, the centre being taken up with the engines and boilers, and cargo, if any.

By making friends with the steerage-steward, as there were so few passengers, I and one of my new acquaintances, who 'knew the ropes' better than I did, managed to secure a whole top shelf to ourselves—i.e. double the accommodation to which we were entitled—and so avoided too close quarters, and obtained ample room for our clothes and bags. Then I went ashore again to purchase my kit. This is what is sold for 10s., according to a printed list, and all perfectly new:—

One bed.	One tin plate.	One spoon.
One blanket.	One tin pint mug.	A piece of soap.
One rug.	One knife.	A towel.
One tin basin.	One fork.	

It sounds plenty for the money; but less than a minute after I had handed over my dollars, a steerage passenger who had made up her mind to go intermediate, and pay the difference, came to give back her lot, which she did not now require, and the utmost the vendor would allow her for them was one dollar; however, after waiting a few minutes she traded them to the next 'steerage' for six shillings.

Another of the Ocean fleet, the 'Wave,' had come in that morning, and I walked across the quay to inspect her, as she looked about twice as big as we were; I found, as I had begun to expect, that the 'Foam' was no greyhound, but one of the oldest

and slowest of the Company's fleet, while the 'Wave' was one of the newest and speediest. But it was too late to change; indeed, when I got back on board the 'Foam' she was already casting off her warps, and a few minutes later we were being towed out backwards into the river; then our screw began to thump, as no doubt did many a homeward-bound and outward-bound heart on board. Even to a casual spectator like myself, who knew no one either on the ship or on shore, there was something curiously affecting in watching the crowd on the quay, and on our deck, waving their handkerchiefs, and straining their eyes to catch the last glimpse of their friends, henceforth, perhaps in many cases for ever, to be separated from them by the broad Atlantic, that, like a type of the River of Death, lies between the Old World and the New; there is, perhaps, only one leave-taking more touching than that which I was witnessing.

But there was little time for sentiment, for all passengers were ordered below, in order that the vessel might be searched for stow-aways. This is done very thoroughly, and then the passengers are sent up again, one at a time, giving up their tickets, and are not allowed to return below until their quarters have been inspected in the same way. If any one is discovered, he is sent back by the pilot-boat, to be prosecuted for attempting to procure a passage without payment; but on this occasion our pilot had to return empty-handed. During the search I made friends with my shelf-mate, who turned out a very agreeable rattle: he was English, had been ten years in the States, and also in Australia; had been at showman-work most of the time, and was now on his way to 'fake,' as he called it, at the Edinburgh Exhibition with a stall for glass-engraving, of which he showed me some very clever and artistic specimens. 'But it isn't those that pay,' he told me; 'it's writing a fellow's or his girl's name on a tumbler (which I get at a half-dollar the gross), and selling at a shilling apiece. Get me a good holiday crowd, and that's the game all the time.' He had worked at most of the principal Dime-shows all through America, and was personally acquainted with all the 'Freaks,' and knew how far each was natural, and in what manner Nature had been assisted. On the shelf underneath were two decent lads, both cabin-boys off English merchant-vessels, who had left their ships because of illness. Opposite these were four atop and three below, mostly of the operative class; at least two of these lay in their bunks without going on deck during the whole voyage, whether sea-sick or not. The contiguity of these

filthy folk was by far the worst feature of the whole business. Smoking was strictly prohibited below, but it was difficult of detection, and when I turned in at night (the only time I put in an appearance in my pen after the first evening's experience) I found it necessary to regularly evade this regulation. It was, of course, far too cold at that time of year to sleep on deck, especially as I had just come up from the Tropics.

The food was very fair: fresh bread baked every day, fresh meat well cooked, tolerable butter, and sometimes marmalade; tea and coffee ready mixed out of urns, reminding one of the old days at one's preparatory school; and everything *ad lib*. Beer and stout could be purchased at sixpence a bottle, but no spirits or wine. The steerage steward, a German, was a very worthy fellow, and did all in his power to make us comfortable, even to lending us his little box of a store-room in which to consume our provisions. Meals concluded, each passenger was supposed to wash his utensils in large tubs provided for that purpose; but we of the upper shelf made an arrangement with the two cabin-boys below that they should do this for us.

Of these boys, one was convalescent from Russian influenza, and the other was ill with dropsy, and both were being sent home by the English Government, under the Distressed British Seamen Act. The Consulate, however, had not troubled to pay the extra ten shillings I have already mentioned for bedding and utensils, and these poor fellows consequently had neither. This is not as it should be, somehow; surely it would be better to increase the fare by a few shillings, and include these necessities, more especially as so huge a profit is made on them by the Company's agent. There were several other steerage passengers who had not been able to afford the purchase, and their condition during the voyage must have been most miserable. However, in the case of these boys, the ship's doctor, when he made his rounds the first night, very properly ordered them bedding and blankets out of the hospital; and in the daytime they made friends with the sailors, and messed with them. Twice a day does the captain, accompanied by the doctor, visit the steerage, in order to see that it is reasonably clean, and to hear any complaints.

British and American subjects were about equally balanced in numbers, and endless discussions went on night and day as to the relative merits of the two countries; most of the arguments were very crude, and savoured strongly of the familiar clap-trap talked

by the uneducated Hyde Park Socialist. But now and again one heard very sensible opinions put forward, my shelf-mate, by reason of his wide experience, being listened to with especial attention, even by the most blatant of the whole lot, an individual who stated he was a delegate from some Irish-American brotherhood.

The men far outnumbered the women, and there were but few children; some of the husbands, while going 'steerage' themselves, brought their wives 'intermediate.' It must, indeed, be a pitiable ordeal for a decent woman to travel in the steerage: there is no one to wait on her when sea-sick, there is no stewardess, she has absolutely no accommodation below, except her quarter of a shelf; the washing-places are all on the main deck above, some little distance along the passages which I have described, and to make her way there she has also to scale the steep companion-ladder—no easy matter when the steamer is rolling scuppers under in the full Atlantic swell, and even the sailors have to use a man-line between decks. The washing-places are not crowded, even in calm weather; they contain a row of small fixed basins, reminding one of those in a cricket pavilion; there is no cold water, only the warm, oily-smelling, condensed water from the engines; no looking-glass, so that my habit of shaving myself caused great amazement. Here I used sometimes to meet a bright little Lancashire lad of about twelve years old, who had been taught to wash himself properly, and not in the fashionable way at sea, with his shirt on. His was a curious experience: his mother had died, and his father, who had some work in New York, had written for him to come out; on his arrival, his father was not to be found, so the authorities, after keeping him a close prisoner for six weeks at Castle Garden, were now sending him home again. Some of my readers may not know what Castle Garden means; it is an American notion, that we could very well endure in London. Every steerage passenger or emigrant who arrives in New York has to land at Castle Garden, and if he is not thought a desirable acquisition—*i.e.* unless he can clearly show he has means to support himself—he gets no further, but is promptly sent back whence he came. We had two or three of these unfortunate folk on board, who, like Moses, had only been allowed to view the promised land from a distance; but they were sufficiently indignant with America and its institutions to be quite reconciled to their lot. But however undesirable you are, you can swagger in gaily, without any questions being asked, if you can afford the few extra pounds for an intermediate passage.

The mighty Liner in one respect resembles the tiny excursion-boat—no steerage-passengers are allowed abaft the funnel; a cord is tied across, on each side of the upper deck, as a line of demarcation, and a very short distance astern of this another line shows the superior limits by which the well-named 'intermediate' is bound. At night these strings were removed, probably for fear of accident, and then the steerage gentlemen would make furtive visits to the other end of the deck, and even peer into the smoking-room to watch the poker-playing. The ladies of the steerage do not enjoy this privilege, for at nightfall ancient, Argus-eyed mariners sought them out, and drove them below, there to be closely guarded by a sleepless sentinel until daylight should again give them their liberty. The female 'intermediate' suffers the same fate; it is only the damsel, or, for that matter, the aged dame of the saloon who can be trusted to realise Mr. Clark Russell's pictures of the moonlit ocean, or to watch the gay fireworks with which passing steamers indicate to each other at night the Line to which they belong. During the day the saloon passengers sometimes returned these visits, and inspected us with well-bred curiosity.

Throughout the whole passage it was miserably cold, with a fine east wind dead against us—hence the few sheltered places on deck were in great demand; when these were all occupied there was nothing for it but to walk up and down, for below was unendurable. Fortunately for myself, who was well hardened to the sea, we had rather a rough passage, which kept many in their bunks for days together, and so I was able to make the time pass pretty well, especially as I had laid in a small library of the pirated 5-cent. editions of all the newest English books before leaving New York. But the voyage was a long and dreary business notwithstanding; in the morning one wished it were evening, and at night one's sleep was constantly disturbed. Owing to head-seas, and fog on the banks (during which the Ocean Company are content to err on the side of caution and go half-speed, which in the case of the 'Foam' was safety indeed), we were thirteen days in reaching Liverpool, with nothing to break the monotony except now and then a passing vessel. We sighted one solitary iceberg, or rather ice-floe, and this caused the greatest excitement, especially when we altered our course in order to have a look at it. We passed about a mile to leeward, and it was estimated at 40 feet high and 900 feet square; but it was very disappointing as a spectacle. 'Our special artist' of a London illustrated paper, whom we were

bringing back from doing the Louisville cyclone, tried all he could with it, but I fancy his sketches have not yet appeared. Also, another day, the weather was entered as half a gale, but after my recent Atlantic experiences in a small yacht I was not inclined to think very much of it. However, it had its revenge, for while I sat all alone under the lee of the wheel-house (where it seemed impossible for any water to come), quietly perusing my 5-cent. 'Master of Ballantrae,' Mr. Stevenson will be glad to hear that a sea came over amidships, clean over the bridge, and literally tons of green water fell on me, washing me against the rail, and of course soaking me to the skin. This same sea nearly carried away one of the boats on the *lee* side, shifting it several feet and bending the davits.

We had two Sundays, on which the passengers don't bother to put on their best clothes; but the sailors turn out very smart, all the Naval Reserve men—of whom we had a large number—appearing in their man-of-war uniforms; there is a service, read by the captain in the absence of a Church of England parson, at 11 A.M., in the saloon, when all are invited to attend, even the pariah 'steerage.' The 'Foam' appeared to me very fortunate in her crew: they all seemed cheery and contented—a great contrast to the dirty, idle, and mutinous seamen one finds on an ordinary merchant vessel. All the pulling and hauling is done by the men, the steam-power being only used for the anchor; to see the crew of the 'Foam' lay out on the yard to furl a topsail made one feel one might be on a training-ship. Generally, in mid-passage the saloon passengers manage to break the monotony by getting up a concert or some theatricals, a small charge being made for admission, which is given to some sailors' institution at Liverpool; but on this occasion they were not sufficiently numerous or energetic. They had, however, the advantage of a little music among themselves every evening, while we forward had to put up with the unmelodious strains of two accordions, which were not in tune with each other, or, indeed, with themselves; the owner of one knew as many as five airs, but the owner of the other only two, and one of those rather tentative, but clearly intended for 'Wait till the Clouds roll by.' These performers no doubt meant very well, and when one was playing a few feet off, the other would come and sit beside you, and begin right away with the utmost calmness.

I was much amused by the exaggerated interest which was

taken in a mild flirtation in which I indulged with the belle of the steerage. She was an Irish girl, but had been employed for some years, she told me, as sale-lady in a dry-goods store in New York (by which I fancy she meant that she worked in a milliner's shop), and was now off on a visit to her relations in Dublin. She was a good sailor, and shared my repugnance to 'below;' she was also very glad to share a large travelling-rug, which I was fortunate enough to have with me. My rivals, who were numerous, looked on with ill-concealed jealousy, the while I regarded them with equanimity, for I felt confident that, however great their other attractions might be, in that icy wind my rug would prevail. It was from her I gleaned scraps of information as to the mysterious portion of the steerage reserved for females: how there was no stewardess, and not even a looking-glass; and how the majority of the women, as well as the men, had decided to have nothing to do with the washing arrangements; and as discouragement to sleep when shut up below at night, how she had, among the company in her pen, an old lady with a secret rum-bottle and a tendency to delirium tremens (which caused her removal to the ship's hospital after a few days), and three mothers whose babies indulged periodically in squalling matches; these, apparently, were conducted on the same lines as those linnet competitions in which one bird sings against the others, all against all, until one only is left, who takes the prize for endurance. Many times a day did my fair friend assure me that, come what may, she was not going back to New York steerage; and I don't think she did.

In the early morning of the twelfth day out (it seemed like the fiftieth) the screw suddenly stopped, and everyone hurried on deck, to find we were in a thick drizzling fog, which gradually lifted, and showed the Irish coast. A few hours more, and the tender was alongside receiving our mails, and the passengers who were to disembark at Queenstown, among them the Irish girl, who had smartened herself up to a wonderful extent. Our farewell was very unromantic; the whole steerage was assembled to witness it, my rivals even indulging in a derisive cheer. But little did she mind, for was not her brother going to meet her now when she landed? and was there not an hotel at Queenstown, where, sure, she could get a bath?

The same night we sighted the lights off the coast of North Wales; and again, in the early dawn, the cessation of the screw, this time accompanied by the roar of the chain, brought us on

deck, to find we had arrived at Liverpool. The river at Liverpool is certainly not particularly beautiful; but in order not to disappoint American visitors, or perhaps to show them at once how we can lick the Yankee in one of his pet *spécialités*, both banks are adorned with the most hideous and gigantic advertisements to be seen anywhere in the world. We had some hours given us in which to contemplate these wonders, before the tender arrived; then came the Custom-house, which ordeal my little library managed somehow to survive; then a bath and breakfast, and then four hours in the train; but after the dreary thirteen days of steamer it seemed but a few minutes before I was on the platform at Euston, receiving that cheeriest of all greetings, the welcome home of the prodigal son.

The steerage is not a comfortable way of travelling, and no doubt the companies do not wish to make it so, or perchance everyone would go 'steerage,' just as everyone goes third class nowadays, owing to the vast improvement made during the last few years in third-class accommodation. But 'steerage' is not to be compared with third class, but rather with tramping and the casual-ward. Still, it must be remembered that the boat in which I learnt my experience is twenty-five years old, and no doubt in many respects old-fashioned. In the modern boats personal cleanliness is probably made more easy, and possibly insisted on when necessary; it is also conceivable that it is exceptional for there to be no stewardess for the female portion of the steerage.

Personally, I had a much better time, as Americans say, than I deserved. This is not the place to specify the many acts of personal kindness which I received from the various officers of the ship, who offered me far greater hospitality than that which I thought it becoming to accept; but I cannot conclude this paper without again expressing my thanks to these gentlemen for their many efforts to make my passage as agreeable as possible.

EIGHT DAYS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'THE TOUCHSTONE OF PERIL.'

I will a round unvarnished tale deliver.—*Othello*.

CHAPTER XXXI.

TURNED OUT.

WE have now to return to the only two left alive of the English girls whom we saw assembled together, so full of youth and hope and happiness, in the shadow of the sacred banian-tree of the Hindoos, in the garden planted by a Mahomedan nobleman, on the first day of our tale. We left them resting with their party on the platform of a well by the side of the road to Abdoolapore. But they cannot rest here long; they must push on; they must try and get to Abdoolapore while the favouring night-time lasts, before the inimical daylight comes. They push on again as fast as they can—push on doggedly. The climate of India is an exhausting one, and this is an exhausting time of the year, and even the men of the party are beginning to feel the effects of this many hours' tramp; they are more accustomed to riding and driving than walking. But they all bear bravely on. The men help the flagging footsteps of the women. Lilian's shoeless feet are now beginning to be very painful. The metalled portion of the road is very hard, if very smooth, and the unmetalled sides are very dusty. But they push on as fast as they can, and bit by bit they are devouring the long straight lengths of road before them. But the friendly night is passing away. The moon is beginning to wane. They are heavy with want of sleep. They are devoured with thirst. Some of them begin to feel as if their whole stock of energy was leaving them, as if they could not walk any more. They must lie down and rest. Let them sink down in the road and sleep there. There is nothing so terrible as to continue the exertion of mind and body beyond the point of complete exhaustion; then it is that a mad irritability sets in; then the needed rest will be sought for regardless of all consequences, even at the expense of life itself—better death than this torture, this devouring of oneself. But what is that by the side of the road? A pool

of water. They rush down to it. At any other time they would not have cared even to dip their fingers into it. But now they dash their hands into it, and drink of it, and bathe their faces in it. They return to the road greatly refreshed, for the water is life. They hear the sharp clatter of hoofs, and against the now brightening eastern sky they see a couple of ponies coming quickly along the road towards them. The two *tatoos* are laden high with bales and bundles, on the top of which their riders sit sideways. There is a considerable interval between the animals, but that does not prevent the riders, accustomed to passing their lives in the open air, from talking to one another.

'*Ayeh! Bhowanee!*' says the foremost man, looking back.

'*Han, bhaee!*' ('Yes, brother!'), says the man behind, the '*bhaee*' being merely a term of friendship.

'It was in the village we have just left behind us that the three Englishmen were killed yesterday?'

The English people can see the village—a large one—standing close by the side of the road.

'Yes.'

'They were escaping from Khizrabad, were they not?'

'Yes, brother.'

'They were all three killed?'

'All three of them.'

Though the English people had seen the riders, the riders had not seen them, by reason of sitting sideways on their ponies and having their faces turned the other way. And so, when the foremost man is suddenly hailed and bid stand still in an unmistakable English voice, he starts so violently that he nearly tumbles off his pony; he had been sitting easily at the point of balance. Hay and Major Coote step up to the pony's head.

'Did you say that three Englishmen had been killed in that village?'—pointing to it.

'Yes,' says the man hesitatingly and unwillingly. He is trembling with fear. How strangely and suddenly had these English people appeared! And had he not inquired about the killing of their fellow-countrymen in a very offhand, unconcerned way?

'Do not be afraid. We do not suppose that you had anything to do with the killing of these gentlemen.'

'No, no,' cries the man. 'He knows we had not'—pointing to his companion, who had now come up also. 'We are travellers from a distance—honest pedlars.'

'We only wanted to know with reference to ourselves. Would it be safe for us to pass through the village?'

'No; you had better avoid it—better keep clear of all villages. The people about here are very evil-minded.'

'You do not know who these Englishmen were?'

'No.'

'Nor how they were slain?'

'No.'

'How far are we from Abdoolapore?'

'Eleven miles.'

'Then if we could get on six miles, get within five miles of Abdoolapore, we should be all right?'

'No; the villages immediately round Abdoolapore and near it are the worst of all. The English people there are in a state of siege.'

'Ha!'

'That way,' goes on the man, pointing northward, 'lies a heavy jungle. You had better get to it and lie concealed there during the daytime, and then move on in the evening and steal into Abdoolapore in the course of the night. You had better get to the jungle as soon as you can; the day is breaking and the people will soon be moving about.'

'How does this jungle lie?'

'That way. That big peepul-tree is not far from the edge of it. We must now move on. We have a long way to go before the heat of the day sets in,' and they rattle their heels on their ponies' flanks and move briskly off. The fugitives now leave the road and make for the peepul-tree, which lies almost at right angles to it, and about three-quarters of a mile off. The splendid sacred tree looms up large against the sky. Beyond it lies about half a mile more of the cultivated tract, and then comes the scrub or jungle. They pass into the tangled wilderness of trees with a great sensation of relief; they can now no longer be seen from half a mile off. They move on and on until they have got well away from the border, well into the heart of it. The morning is now breaking. They have reached a place where the trees stand very thickly together, and here they determine to rest. They cast themselves down on the hard bare ground, and so experience one of the most delicious sensations of their lives. What an active delight is there in the mere sensation of non-exertion! But they do not enjoy it for long. They are soon fast asleep. They

have soon passed into the vast refuge-hall of sleep. They have soon sunk beneath the renovating waters of oblivion. The sun has risen a good way above the horizon ; the rays which have fallen upon them warm from the beginning, are now beginning to be hot ; the west wind, which will soon increase to a fiery gale, is beginning to stir the dust about them, and still they continue to sleep. Then Coote awakens, and sits up with his back against a tree. Well, the early morning cup of tea would be very pleasant, certainly ; but he could do without that, would not be troubled at the thought of having nothing to eat, if he only had his cigar-case or pipe in his pocket. That is the want that troubles him. He has often lain out under a tree before, and his pipe has been to him as meat and drink and lodging. It is a great bore to have nothing to smoke. He yawns and rubs his eyes, and then a rustle catching his quick hunter's ear, he looks up expecting to see a blue cow or an antelope, or it may perchance be a pig or a wild boar ; but he sees instead a group of natives standing before him. He leaps up and draws his sword and arouses Hamilton, who has been sleeping next him, with a strong kick ; and then there is a great commotion, a calling and crying, and awakening of one another, and the four Englishmen are standing together in a group with their drawn swords in their hands, while the women shelter behind them. The coming months are to present many a group such as that on the face of the land. Beatrice, standing a little apart by herself, sees the foremost man of the group of natives—he carries a gun, which Coote notes with surprise is not the ordinary matchlock of the country, but an excellent English rifle—sees him looking at her with great kindness—a kindness she does not like.

‘We have no desire to do you any harm,’ says the man, with his eyes fixed on Beatrice. He is a stout man, and speaks in a soft muffled tone of voice.

‘I see you are officers,’ he goes on, now looking at the men. ‘I suppose you belonged to the regiments stationed at Khizrabad ?’

‘Yes ; I was in command of the 76th Regiment, in which this gentleman’—pointing to Hay—‘was also an officer.’

‘A very bad regiment,’ says the fat man bluntly. ‘And you are now on your way to Abdoolapore and are in hiding here during the day-time, I understand.’

They were in hiding, but it was not pleasant to be told so. There was a terrible humiliation in having to lurk about the land

through which they had hitherto made only lordly progress. That it was a superiority of race which enabled us to conquer and hold India and rule it well; that this superiority was intensely, delightfully felt by the English in India; that it was strongly, irksomely felt by the natives; that these feelings had a great influence in the stir of the passions of this Mutiny time; that they added to the fierce satisfaction of the overthrow and slaughter, to the fierce delight of the bloody reprisal: these, to me, at all events, are undoubted facts.

'We are resting here,' says Coote, quietly.

Except in the matter of colour, this big bluff man might have served as a good representative of our own King Hal: he had the same face and figure, the same big cheeks and pursed-up little mouth, the same look of strength and sensuality.

'You cannot keep those delicate ladies'—fixing his large black eyes on Beatrice—'out here in the sun and the hot wind all day long, and without anything to eat or drink. It is not safe for them, and you, to be out in the open. Three Englishmen were slain in a village not far from this yesterday. You had better come with me to my house. I live in a *poorwa* (out-lying hamlet) which I have recently established myself, and which is inhabited only by myself and my brethren. You will be quite safe there. The people in the villages about here are very treacherous and cruel. I see; you are thinking why should I not be the same. But I do not belong to these parts. I have only settled here. I am not a Goojur or a Ranghur' (scornfully), 'but a Rajpoot. You may trust me. If I wanted to do you any harm, why, I could easily shoot you men with my gun—shoot you down like deer.'

'A man with a gun certainly has the advantage over us,' says Major Coote, bitterly.

'You had better come to our village and remain there during the day-time, and we will escort you into Abdoolapore at night.'

There seems nothing else to do. If so the man wishes it, so must they do.

'You do not mean to deal deceitfully by us?'

'No.'

'Will you swear that you do not wish to injure us?'

'*Bap ki kum—Beta ki kum*' ('I swear it by my father—I swear it by my son.')

'Very good—then we will go with you.'

It is with a strange sensation that they move away with him.

Again are they embarked on a new adventure. What will the end of this one be? The possibilities of strange adventures are about us all, continually, everywhere; but still most of us pass quietly through the various stages of life, glide quietly down the stream of existence, which for most of us has a very equable, calculable flow. Most especially was this the case in India with those in 'the service,' with its fixed and certain rates of pay and pension, its determined periods of leave and furlough and retirement. The passage of those in the civil or military service of the East India Company from Haileybury and Addiscombe to India and then back to Cheltenham and Bath, was like the passage of the East Indiamen from London to Calcutta and back: there might be shipwreck, but most people, most vessels, passed over the well-known portions of the route in the usual times, and accomplished it with the usual alternations of good and bad days safely. The Mutiny came as a terrible break. The lives of all those fugitives had hitherto moved on well-known roads, along well-known channels. Then, suddenly, during the last two days, they had found themselves launched upon unknown and dangerous streams and pathways. Whither would this new track, this new channel lead them? How should they fare upon it?

Major Coote thinks very well, when he finds that their new fat friend is a great sportsman, a 'devoted votary of the chase'—to use the older, more stately phraseology. He was now out after antelope. The two are soon deep in sporting talk. Sportsmanship forms a very strong common bond. The fat man is very proud of his rifle. That leads to a talk about guns; that to one about powder and shot, which lasts until they have reached the burly man's newly established settlement, a mile and a half away.

The settlement consists as yet of half a dozen houses only. There are some very fine trees, the remains of some primæval forest or ancient grove, about it; and it stands by the side of a little lake. Its shadiness, its quiet seclusion, and its smallness are all very agreeable to the fugitives. It was the admirable conjunction of the lake and the trees and the vicinity of the forest, the stout man points out in his friendly talk, which had led him to establish this hamlet here. The vicinity of the forest was agreeable to him, not only as a sportsman but as a cultivator, a householder. Manure for the land, fodder for the cattle, fuel for the house, are the chief wants throughout the country-side in India. The jungle afforded him an ample supply of fuel, so that

he need not use his cowdung in that way, but add it to his manure-heap; and also admirable grazing ground for his cattle.

‘You must remain a little while under these trees until I can arrange in what houses to place you. My house is not large enough to accommodate you all. We will distribute you two and two. These two young ladies shall go into my own house.’

Some of the men with him exchange amused glances.

The stout man is very much of a gay Lothario. He resembles our bluff King Hal in disposition and in character, as well as in face and person. He is notorious for his want of conjugal fidelity. This has cost him much, in domestic trouble as well as in money. However, just now he and his companions bustle about to make their new-found guests comfortable immediately and where they are. They bring out stools and bedsteads for them to sit upon. They bring them water and milk. They bring them sweetmeats. The fat man brings a large leaf full of *buddos* and *peras*, and presses them on Beatrice, looking at her the while with a tender solicitude—much too tender a solicitude. At any other time the English people would not have touched these bazaar-made sweetmeats; but just now they are very hungry, and they find them very welcome. And the milk is fresh and the water cool. And although the heat and the glare are beginning to be great, and the hot wind beginning to blow, the very thick umbrage of the trees affords them considerable shelter from them. And they have not yet recovered from the fatigue of the night before, and the sensation of merely sitting still is delightful. The remote and secluded situation of the little settlement affords them a delightful feeling of security. The trees under which they are seated stand immediately in front of the zemindar’s own dwelling-place, and though he had proposed only to accommodate the two girls in it, they see that it looks big enough to take them all in in case of need, and that, like all the better classes of houses in the East, it is built with a view to security and defence. They could hold their own in it against a mob. And so they drink their milk and eat their sweetmeats with great satisfaction. Those not disturbed by the stout man’s looks think their troubles at an end. That disturbance affects Beatrice alone, but unfortunately it increases with the satisfaction of her companions. Her face, relieved of the dust and grime of the night before, shines forth in all its glorious beauty. The hopeful looks and words of her companions make it shine forth all the more. And the brighter it becomes the more tender and

assiduous—and they are already tender and assiduous enough—do the stout man's attentions grow. 'See how her beauty has overpowered him! The fever of love is upon him, and he is losing his senses,' remarks one of the villagers to another, out of hearing of every one else. Alas for the beauty of woman and all the trouble it has produced! 'You must have some more sweetmeats. I will go and get you some more; some very excellent ones,' says the stout man to Beatrice, looking at her most tenderly; and he hurries away to the house.

Though the stout man was indeed, as he said, a Rajpoot, he was not one of the highest class, and though now a landed proprietor, the owner of one or two villages, he had begun life in a humble capacity, and had made his money by some Government contracts. His wife had not attained to the dignity of a zenana until he had been able to build this house. It was only then that she had given up the marketing without and the cooking at home. And now, because her hands and face had grown coarse in her husband's service, he must, forsooth, be always seeking for softer ones! Issuing out of the gateway, the fat man has still his back to the house, as he bends before Beatrice and holds out the big dry leaf piled with some luscious confection towards her, and says, in tender accents which make his voice sound more muffled than ever: 'Take one of these'—when 'Take that!' sounds upon his ear, and he receives a cuff on the back of the neck which sends him staggering forward, and all the sweetmeats are scattered in the dust.

'And out of this, you!' shouts a tall strong woman, who had flown out of the house and rushed towards them like a tornado.

'Out of this, you!' and she hoists up one end of the bedstead and tumbles Beatrice off it, and as Mrs. Fane runs forward to lift Beatrice up the virago pours upon them both a torrent of that filthy personal abuse for which the East is famous, but of which, luckily, mother and daughter do not comprehend a single word.

'Be off, you white-faced ——! Begone you old ——!' exclaims the furious woman; and then there is a great commotion. The Englishmen all jump up. Hay rushes forward and places himself by the side of Beatrice. But the turmoil is soon assuaged by her who had aroused it, as a magician allays the tumult of the waves with his wand. The enraged wife has obtained possession of a wand too, a most effective one. She has seized the solid bamboo club belonging to one of the men, and swings it round her head with her strong arm.

'In with *you*!' she cries to her husband, pointing towards their house with the club. 'In with you at once!' The stout man turns his face away from them all, and moves towards the house with abject footsteps, and disappears within the gateway.

'And now you get out of this village, the whole pack of you—every one of you! Be off with you, be off!'

'Be off with you at once!' she cries, advancing towards the English people, who have now got together in a group, with a most menacing flourish of her club. 'Away, you sons of swine!' she cries, looking at the men. 'Away, you breeders of swine!' she cries, looking at the women.

'Now that she has put aside the veil, and come out of the zenana, you will not be able to remain here any longer,' says one of the men to Coote. 'She is a terrible woman, and very strong, and she will fall upon you with the club if you try to oppose her. She might do the women with you an injury, perhaps a fatal one: she is very powerful.'

'We must go,' says Coote, and they move out from under the pleasant umbrage of the trees.

'Begone! Out of this! Away with you! Begone!' shouts and bellows this maddened wife. (An utter abandonment to the emotions is, I think, more common in the passionate East than with us; women drown themselves in India on very slight provocation.) As she follows them, flourishing the staff furiously, all the men of the hamlet hold back. 'Aroynt! Be off! Begone!' she shouts, as she follows them to the edge of the little settlement, which it does not take them long to reach. And she stands there until she has seen them well out of sight. And so ended that adventure—rather ignominiously.

CHAPTER XXXII.

TREACHERY.

THEY have nothing to do but pursue the pathway by which they have left the hamlet. At first it passes across a cultivated tract, where the earth is quite dry and hard and bare, but where there are trees for the eye to rest on. Then it brings them to the edge of a barren plain, which stretches away before them as far as the eye can reach. These great plains, quite bare or covered with

scrub : the cultivated tracts : and large shallow lakes, now almost dry, make up the face of the land.

When they have got on to the plain they seem to have entered a sea of fire. The flaming sunlight burns, and blisters, and blinds them. The waves of light, moving with such terrific force, pass in through the opening of the eyes and beat with maddening force in the dark caverns of the brain. The hot dust blinds them and chokes them. There is nothing for the eye to rest on : it wearies with gazing into nothingness. The level plain is ever the same, and still the same. They are moving onward, slowly but still moving onward, and yet they seem not to move onward at all—seem to be fixed at the centre of a huge wide circle, seem to be stationary, seem to be standing still beneath the apex of the vast unbroken vault of the sky. There is not a tree or a shrub upon the plain. Its smooth monotony is broken only by the clouds and pillars of dust. And so they move onward in great suffering. The heat is terrible, the glare terrible, the dust terrible. They endure still greater suffering, as the sun, having reached the zenith—at this season of the year he rides very nearly straight overhead in that latitude—begins to descend from it : for those three first hours of the afternoon constitute the worst time of the day. It is the period of accumulated heat : the earth and air are surcharged with it, and the sun continues to pour down his fiery shower with scarcely diminished violence. And so they move on beneath the flaming fiery sword of the sun, which has such power to slay, as many a poor Englishman or Englishwoman was to prove in the coming months. Some of them feel giddy, some sick ; to some the clods by the side of the road are of a bloody hue ; some have a buzzing in the ears ; and others, when they close their eyes against the glare, hear the distant chiming of bells. The skin is beginning to peel off their hands and faces, which are burnt and blistered to the point of agony. The soft arms and shoulders of the women are simply a mass of pulp. And still they strive to keep on as cheerily as they may, striving to talk and even to laugh, which the severe burning of the muscles round the mouth renders a very painful process.

No murmur escapes the lips of these worthy representatives of England's womanhood : brave and cheerful are the words that issue from the lips of these worthy representatives of England's manhood. William Hay is even gay. Now is the time to play the Christian hero. Now is the time to give proof of the sustaining

power of his principles. That they are officers, and gentlemen, and Englishmen, and have to bear themselves worthily as such, is common to them all; but each of the men has some distinctive quality that sustains him individually. With Hay, as has been said, it is his ideal of the Christian hero, his godliness. Fane is supported by his pride. Coote displays the endurance, the power of sustaining fatigue, the toughness of the huntsman, the tracker of big game. Hamilton's is youthful pluck. But they get over the ground, the burning ground, very slowly. Poor Lilian's thin stockings are worn away. She hobbles over the burning marl on bare and bleeding feet, un murmuring—she, the child, not the least heroic of them all. Seeing the pain, the torture with which she moves, the difficulty with which she moves at all, two of the men ultimately make a 'cat's cradle' with their arms, and carry her so. They continue on that barren plain until late in the afternoon; it was a prolonged torture, but there has been one advantage in it, they have had the road all to themselves. Only very strong necessity would lead anyone, even a native of the land, to be out upon it during those terrible midday hours.

But now they have arrived at its end, and at the beginning of another closely cultivated, densely inhabited tract. They dare not show themselves on the latter. So large a party as theirs cannot hope to escape observation. Now is the time that the people will be moving about. It seems to them providential that just beyond its commencement lies a large dense mango-grove. They determine to take shelter in this until the evening time. As they pass into the coolness and darkness of the grove, comparative only though these be, they experience a most exquisite pleasure, a pleasure similar to that of the passing away of a horrible pain. As they make their way into its innermost depths, and throw themselves down on the ground at the foot of two trees, how exquisite the sensation of the relief from labour, how keen the delight of rest, rest to the overworked limbs, the overtried brain, the overwrought will! They have no longer to carry their wearied frames, to bear themselves upright. They are witting only of rest; mind, body, and soul, all three, seem to have passed away into it, been dissolved in it. It is difficult to describe the sensation, even though I have experienced it; difficult to describe it, because it is nothingness. They have seen with delight that the grove is an isolated one, has no village near it. And so they abandon themselves to that delightful rest.

But they do not enjoy it for long. They have soon not only entered upon but passed through a new adventure: they suddenly find themselves set upon and disarmed, and hustled, and roughly handled, and most effectually robbed. Their approach to the grove had been noticed by some Ranghurs, members of one of the most violent, and lawless, and predatory tribes of that quarter, who had themselves previously taken shelter from the heat in the grove, and were seated at its farther end. They send one of their body, a celebrated tracker—every Ranghur is a robber—to make closer observation of the fugitives. He creeps up to within a dozen yards of them entirely unsuspected.

‘What is the hour, Fane?’ says Major Coote, looking at his timepiece; ‘my watch has stopped.’ ‘It is a quarter to four,’ says Major Fane, drawing out his large gold watch and looking at it. The three-quarter naked native, lying quiet on his stomach behind a tree, notes the watch and chain—notes also that there is a very handsome ring on a finger of the hand that holds it. Fane was fond of rings. The epaulettes and sword-belts of the men are not difficult to see; but his keen eye has also caught the sparkle of gems. Mrs. Fane and Beatrice both have very handsome and valuable diamond guard-rings on their fingers; Mrs. Fane has also a gold chain about her neck. This party is decidedly worth the robbing. He then notes the position of the men, and of the trees around them, very carefully, and then glides away again, unseen, unheard. And not long afterwards he and another man, as lean and lithe and lissome, and almost as stealthy as himself, are lying behind the huge trunks of two of the trees. And now they have run forward on their bare noiseless feet, and Fane and Coote, reclining not far from each other, are under the surprise of their sudden appearance, when this head tracker of the gang, the man who had observed them and settled what he should do, has whipped up both their swords and leaped away with them. It was very cleverly done. The man had certainly carried out his part most dexterously and successfully: he had displayed great cleverness, boldness, and agility; he was notorious for these—very quick of head and hand and foot. His less gifted companion does not make the affair, the disarmament, as complete as it was meant to be: he gets hold of only one sword, that belonging to young Hamilton. Hay foils him in the attempt to seize his. But still enough has been done. The Englishmen have been rendered practically powerless. One man by himself

cannot fight as four men together would have fought. And the moment the chief tracker had dashed away with the swords the remaining members of the gang, who had moved up as near as they could, came running and leaping down the leafy aisles, and the Englishmen find themselves in rough strong hands, and being robbed by nimble fingers: and their watches are conveyed, and the epaulettes taken off their shoulders, and even the buttons cut off their coats, 'before they know where they are.' And now is Mrs. Fane's proud spirit wounded as she feels those rough hands about her person. She starts away from the ruffian who is striving to pull the chain from off her neck. 'I will give it to you,' she says. And then she has to take her rings off and hand them to him, otherwise she sees quite plainly that he would pull them off himself with his rough fingers: he will have every one of them, not only her engaged ring, that splendid and valuable half-hoop of diamonds, but even her wedding-ring, by her most valued of them all—she has to part even with that. 'Off with it!' cries the man, as she says that it is of no great value and begs that it may be spared her. 'Is it not of gold?' They are very thorough robbers, these. As has been said, they even cut the buttons off the men's uniform jackets. The girls too have to part with their trinkets: Beatrice with her loved engagement ring, Lilian with her much-prized first watch. And then the fellows have disappeared, and the Englishmen find themselves standing there, deeply humiliated and deprived of their weapons, for the robbers have carried off their swords. There comes over them a feeling of helplessness such as they had not experienced before. With their swords they had felt that they could fight a mob, at all events overawe it. But now they would be no match for half a dozen men armed with clubs. And the women understand this too, and this helplessness of the men is added to their own natural load of helplessness.

They have toiled on all through the fierce heat of the day, all through the fierce dry gale, all through the clouds of choking dust, without having had a drop of water to drink. They are faint, ill, with thirst. 'Oh, for a drop of water to moisten the parched lips!'—that is the thought of every one, but the saying of none. They all maintain a proud silence. None of them will complain.

Pride in their port, defiance in their eye,
I see the lords of human kind pass by,

was written of the English long before their conquest of India

but there is no doubt that the conquest and rule of that vast land have tended to enhance that feeling of race superiority, more especially in those immediately concerned in that rule. No doubt that feeling often displays itself in India in vulgar, odious forms; but if the feeling has its weak and detestable, it has also its strong and admirable side. To it, to the strength of body and of mind to which it is attributable, are due those strenuous labours in the office, the court of justice, and the field, such as were never paralleled in India before, and which the natives of the land themselves shrink from, do not hold worth the enduring, even if they could endure them; from it, from the sense of it, have come those noblest of our acquisitions in India, our name for uprightness and justice. Long may the English continue to hold an opinion which leads them to be upright and just! Long may they continue to consider any shrinking from danger and hardship as incompatible with that superiority of race! Long may they consider it due to themselves to display superior qualities, a superior honesty and a superior justice, a superior courage and a superior endurance of hardship, in India!

After the exchange of some few words they seat themselves quietly down again to await the coming of the solitude and safety of the night. They may now hope to escape molestation during the few remaining hours of daylight. Major Coote had gathered that the robbers had come from a distance. 'It was a good thing we thought of resting here for half an hour,' one of the fellows had said as they were moving away. There is no village within sight. The vast barren plain stretches on one side, a long reach of the flat open unfenced fields, just now barren too, extends on the other.

So they sit patiently resting for some time, when they are disturbed by the sound of a human voice. They may expect a stray traveller or two to pass into the grove, but they do not mind that. What attracts their attention now is that the man seems to be chanting or reading aloud. It is some one reading aloud. There is the nasal intonation, the continued rise and fall of the voice, with which orientals read, especially read poetry. They are surprised that any one should be reading aloud in such a place as this. They are still more surprised when, the voice getting nearer and nearer, the reader himself comes in view, passing slowly down the pillared aisle of shade parallel to the one in which they have seated themselves. He is a young man curiously dressed. Around his person are the flowing yellow garments of a Brahmin

priest ; on his head is the biretta of a Catholic priest ; on his feet a pair of patent-leather boots. Though they can now, of course, hear him quite plainly, they do not understand what he is reading. From the shape of the book, or rather collection of pages, he carries in his hand, Major Coote guesses, and guesses rightly, that he is reading the Hindoo Scriptures. The young man is, in fact, reciting a sloka of the Vedas ; but the sonorous Sanscrit tongue is not known to any of the Englishmen present. The young native is entirely absorbed in the reading, the reciting, of the sacred verses, and he does not observe the seated fugitives until he is within a few yards of them : and so they have time to make minute observation of him. The colour of his skin is very fair ; he has a long aquiline nose, and a long retreating forehead, and a long projecting chin. His face is much thrust forward, for he has a very strong forward bend or stoop in his tall thin narrow-shouldered frame. He is pacing slowly along. And now a sesquipedalian Sanscrit word is stopped in his mouth as he gazes at them with a look of astonishment. He has large projecting eyes. He pulls up short, and then advances towards them with a peculiar long gliding step. Having observed the patent-leather shoes much affected by the educated (*i.e.* English educated) native youth, they are not much surprised when the young man addresses them with, 'Goot evening, ladies !' 'Goot evening, gentlemen !' and they expect him to ask where they have come from ; but they are astonished at the form of the questions which he now pours upon them in his rapid fluent voice : 'What you do here ? In these deserts vast and antres wild ? What you do here under the shadow of these melancholy boughs ? What bring your wandering footsteps here ? Where you come from ? Where you go to ? As Carlyle say, "Whence ? and ah ! whither ?" As Shakespere say, "That is the question."'

'Who are you ?' asks Hay, by way of counter question—and looking at the young man curiously.

'A servant of the Lord and a seeker after righteousness,' replies he.

'But what are you ?'

'A student, and a searcher for the truth.'

'You are a Brahmin ?'

'Yes,' says the young fellow proudly ; 'but I not idolater. I educated in missionary school. I study every religion—Hindoo, Christian, Mahomedan. I read the Bible, the Koran, and the

Shasters,' and he lays his hand on the long narrow leaves he holds in his hand. 'Plenty good in all religions, plenty bad. Take the good of every religion and leave the bad, and make new religion. I make new religion.'

In India and the East new sects and religions are constantly springing up: some to take root and flourish, and grow up into wide-spread systems, most to wither and perish after a brief and narrow existence. But whether this young man will hereafter come to lie in a sacred shrine, a holy sepulchre, and be worshipped as a saint, a prophet, or a god, is of much less interest to the fugitives than whether at the present moment he is more likely to help them or hurt them; whether he might not get them some water to drink. Educated in an English school, and speaking the English language, he will most likely be friendly.

'Do you live near here?'

'Yes; my village is contiguous. I make supposition, that you come from Khizrabad?'

'Yes; we have come from Khizrabad.'

'On shanks' mare?'

The natives of India who have learned English are fond of using such phrases, in order to redeem their conversation from pedantry and give it a light colloquial air.

'Yes; we have come on foot.'

'Many English people killed in Khizrabad—too much blood flow there. Very terrible, very bad. All men should love one another and not hate one another—that more proper. No man hurt another. That the true religion—that I teach. All men are brothers, members of same body: should love one another, help one another—that I teach. Whence?—from Khizrabad. Whither?—to Abdoolapore?'

'Yes; we are making for Abdoolapore. How far is it from here?'

'Eight mile as crow fly. Nine or ten mile by the road over Hindun bridge. You bring no attendants?'

'No.'

'Have to run away too fast?'

The young man's wandering glance has been turned curiously on each of them by turns, but it has rested longest on Major Fane; and now, as Fane puts his glass into his eye and scrutinises this would-be founder of a new religion, he exclaims:

'Tis strange, most strange, 'tis passing strange. I very much

bewilder and confuse. Is not this the gentleman in charge of Khizrabad magazine? Methinks I saw him when I went to see the arsenal.'

'Yes; I was in charge of the arsenal at Khizrabad,' says Fane.

'But I hear arsenal blown up, and everybody in it killed.'

'Yes; the arsenal was blown up, but this gentleman was not blown up with it,' says Hay; 'though it is most wonderful that he was not.'

'And I see you no weapons have; no swords by side, no guns, no pistols in pocket?'

'No; we are quite unarmed.'

'Helpless as babes?'

'Not quite that, I hope.'

'And you bring nothing to eat with you?'

'No.'

'Then you are very hungry. "Hunger in their rear, confusion in their van;" no—"confusion in their rear, hunger in their van." I forget. You very hungry?'

'Not so hungry as thirsty. We are very thirsty. We have been walking in the sun for many hours, and have not had a drop of water to drink.'

'Plenty wells.'

'We have nothing to draw the water with.'

'I compassionate you very much, very much indeed. Hunger and thirst—very bad thing, terrible thing. In all religions it say, "Give food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty." I teach that.'

'Have you got your *lotah* (drinking-vessel) with you?' says Major Coote.

The *lotah* is so made that, by tying a string round the neck, you can draw water with it from a well, as the natives always do. No native ever travels without his *lotah*.

'No,' says the young man, 'my village not far. I came here only for short time, in order to read holy book and meditate under these trees, in this vast continuity of shade.'

'D—n his jaw! I wish he had brought his *lotah*!' cries Coote, impatient, to young Hamilton.

'But you all very hungry? You all very thirsty?'

'Yes; very,' says Coote curtly.

'Then why you not come to my village? It not far. There we give you food and drink. Plenty good water there.'

'We wish to avoid villages. We have heard that other English people have been ill-treated in some of the villages about here.'

'Yes; they kill them three Englishmen. Very bad people those. Very wrong to kill anything, even insect. But those people evil-minded people, thieves and robbers. People in my village all Brahmins, like myself. They not hurt you, but help you. I take care of you. I educated in missionary school. I fond of English people.'

Fane and Coote and Hay confer together apart for a few minutes. They decide that it will be best to accept the offer of the young religious enthusiast. They are very hungry and terribly thirsty. They have no means of procuring water for themselves.

They accompany him across the fields, on which so rich and lush a harvest waves in the autumn and winter months, but which now lie so hard and dry, so barren and bare, devoid of all herbage; and on them hard and dry rests the hard dry evening light. The young Hindoo discourses continually, his flow of talk seems ceaseless, and everything seems to produce a quotation. He looks at Lilian hobbling along on her cut and bleeding feet, and he says, 'She move as Goldsmith say, "with painful steps and slow."'

'That barren plain must be a very wide one,' says Hay, as he glances back towards it on first leaving the grove.

'Yes; it is "a wild immeasurably spread."'

'You have plenty of wells here,' says Major Coote, as they advance farther into the fertile tract.

'Yes; yet for you is "water, water everywhere, and not a drop to drink!"'

'Yes, certainly, without something to draw it with,' says matter-of-fact Major Coote.

The young man discourses at large about his new religion, in which, as he informs them, 'mercy and truth have met together, justice and peace have kissed together.' 'Peace upon earth and goodwill towards men,' he quotes. 'But to thyself be true, and thou canst not then be false to any man,' he quotes.

And now the tree-encircled village comes in view, and now they have reached it. The *choupal*, or guest-house, generally placed in the precincts, stands on this side of the village, and it is the first house they come to. The young Brahmin leads them into it. Usually the *choupal* consists simply of a long open

shed without any furniture in it (the Indian traveller carries his bedding and cooking apparatus with him); with some trees and an open space for the travellers' carts and cattle, his riding horse or his driving bullocks, in front of it. But, as we have said, this tract of country was largely occupied by predatory tribes, with whom cattle-lifting was an hereditary and highly honoured occupation. The space in front of the choupal here had therefore been enclosed by a strong fence, with a gateway in it. The young Brahmin, the founder of the new religion, in which universal benevolence was to be the cardinal principle—"Quenchless desire of universal happiness," as Shelley say,' to quote the young fellow's words—having led them through the gateway and up to the house, takes his departure, saying, 'I will now go and get you some things to sit upon and something to eat and drink.' Moving into the village, he encounters three or four men; the string over their shoulders—they have nothing on but their skull-caps and their loin-cloths—indicates that they are Brahmins.

'There are seven Christians in the choupal,' he says to them exultingly.

'Seven Christians?'

'Yes; three women and four men.'

'How did they get here?'

'I brought them!'—in a tone of great triumph. 'Is it not a great haul?' (Of course, he is now using, not English, but Hindostanee colloquialisms.)

'As how?'

'Has not the Nuwâb Sahib placed a reward of a hundred rupees on the head of every English person? It is a haul of seven hundred rupees for us, for the village; and I did it—I lured them hither.'

'But we have to get them into Khizrabad.'

'The men are not armed. But still, if we tried to take them into Khizrabad ourselves, they would resist and injure some of us. They are great fighters, these English; great fighters, even with their fists; and some of the men might escape by running away. I have thought of all this—I have brains. I will mount one of our mares and ride into Khizrabad at once. I will return early to-morrow morning, accompanied by a troop of the Nuwâb's cavalry, and we will make our prisoners over to them. You must keep charge of them during the night. Feed them well, and get them to sleep. Tell them what you like. Now that they are in

the choupal they are like birds in a trap, like fish in a net. They cannot struggle or escape as they would in the open. They can only get out at the gate; close it, and place a man at it with a sword—there are two swords in the village. It was *I* who lured them hither.' He has poured all this out with his usual rapidity of speech. And then he hurries away to get the mare. He will not send anyone else into Khizrabad. *He* must be the sole hero of this adventure. Vanity was a leading trait in this young man's character; and it was so far to his credit that, in his betrayal of the English, he was actuated more by the desire for *éclat* than for gain. He desired to obtain the reward as much for the sake of the community as his own. He was greedy of praise; and he should obtain it, not only from his village brethren, but from the Nuwâb. While he hurries in one direction, two of his Brahmin brethren hurry to the choupal, picking up clubs as they go, while the others proceed to get some charpoys for the entrapped fugitives to sit and sleep on, food for them to eat, water for them to drink. And those fugitives are soon busily engaged in the delightful occupation of washing their hands and faces, and drinking—how they do drink, and drink, and drink! And though the cold unleavened cakes are like leather, and the sweetmeats are stale, they find the occupation of eating a very pleasant one too, for they are very hungry. And so they munch away at the parched grain and suck away at the lumps of coarse sugar which are its usual accompaniment, and drink again of the cold water. The young Brahmin has certainly carried out his promise of providing them with food and drink. They wonder that he has not come himself to act the part of host. They enquire for him.

'He has been obliged to go to a neighbouring village on some business—he will be back in an hour or two,' says one of the ready-lying Brahmins. It is very pleasant to rest, and eat and drink, but the main desire with every one, most especially with Major Fane and his wife and Hay, is to find themselves within the safe precincts of Abdoolapore. So Cooté says to one of the Brahmins: 'Now that we are refreshed, thanks to your kind hospitality, for which we shall not forget to make due acknowledgment, we must be proceeding on our way. How far is it to Abdoolapore?'

'About nine miles.'

'I suppose we should have to go along village tracks?'

'Yes; there is no highway near.'

‘You could send a man with us to guide us?’

‘Yes; but we could send no one with you to protect you. There are only five or six of us now in the village. It is not a large village, and most of our men are away on pilgrimage just now—so you must not think of moving for another hour or so. You must wait until all the people have retired to the villages. You know that these Ranghurs and Goojurs who inhabit the villages about here are great rascals—they would kill you simply because you are Feringhees—they killed three of your countrymen yesterday. You had better not venture out until later on.’

‘Nine miles—we could do that in three hours. We can wait until ten o’clock—that would be neither too early nor too late.’

And so they settle.

They pass the time in finding out from the Brahmins all they know about the recent occurrences at Khizrabad. What they have to tell is not pleasant for English ears to hear—makes them not the less anxious to be within the safe precincts of Abdoolapore. Surely it must be ten o’clock. They have no watches now, but they can judge by the position of the moon.

‘We must now be going,’ says Hay to the Brahmin who seems to be told off to deal with them. ‘Will you let us have a man to show us the way?’

‘Will you not wait until Nund Coomar’—that was the name of the young Brahmin who had brought them thither—‘has returned?’

‘We should like to see him again very much, but we cannot wait. We have not far to go, but these ladies are very tired and footsore and can walk but slowly.’

‘That is just it,’ says the lying-tongued Brahmin, the priestly agriculturist. ‘Nund Coomar has gone to the house of a friend who has a *bhylee*’ (kind of carriage), ‘and he will bring it back with him for the use of these ladies—he was much touched with their condition.’ (Nund Coomar’s new religion of universal benevolence affords much amusement to his brethren, to his fellow-priests and co-proprietors of the lands of the village.) ‘He will now be back very soon.’

They know that with Lilian walking is simply torture. And Mrs. Fane and Beatrice too are very footsore; their feet too are cut and blistered; to them, too, to-day, the walking over the burning ground at noon has been torture. The carriage would enable *them* to get on so much faster, that it seems worth their while

to wait for it; they would save time thereby. And the Brahmin engages their attention with the narration of some incident—real or invented—of the outbreak at Khizrabad. And then they say they must be off; and then he says that he will send a man to the border of the village to listen if the carriage is coming. But now the moon is nearing the zenith, and they insist that they can wait no longer.

‘Why should you undertake this troublesome and dangerous walk?’ says the smooth-tongued Brahmin. ‘These poor women are very weary, that poor child’s feet are very sore; your best plan will be to remain here where you are comfortable and safe, and we will send a man into Abdoolapore to inform your friends there of your condition, and they will send out soldiers and carriages who will take you all in safely and comfortably.’

‘We would rather walk in than wait,’ says Mrs. Fane decisively, in Hindostanee. Then in English to her husband and the others: ‘Do not agree to this on any account. Let us go on at once.’

‘We must now proceed on our journey,’ says Hay. ‘Which is the man who is to guide us?’

‘Nund Coomar brought you here and is responsible for your safety. You cannot go before he returns.’

‘But we must—we have now no more time to lose,’ says Hay.

‘The best thing you can all do now,’ says the Brahmin quietly, ‘is to go to sleep. If Nund Coomar returns with the bhylee in another hour or two, you can then go on. In any case I will at once send a man into Abdoolapore to give notice of your being here and an escort party will come to you here or meet you on the way. But proceed just now you cannot.’

‘Cannot!’ says Hay. ‘You would not prevent us, would you?’

‘I have placed a guard of four men, two armed with clubs and two with swords, at the gate, to guard and protect you; they also have orders not to allow you to leave this place until Nund Coomar returns.’

‘What! are we prisoners? Would you make prisoners of us—officers—*Sahib log*? Do you know that these’—pointing to Coote and Fane—‘are gentlemen of high position?’ says Hay.

‘You cannot say we have made you prisoners, when we are only taking care of you. The best thing for you all to do now is to go to sleep. I must retire to rest myself. Salaam!’ And he and the other Brahmins are gone.

What does all this mean? To those who think it forbodes the worst it is terrible. To be within so few miles of their destination and to be withheld from reaching it! This was to have one's bark founder and allow the inimical waves to overwhelm one at one's very door. Had they gone on from the grove, they would have been in Abdoolapore ere this. (They make quite sure of that—they ignore all possibility of failures and mischances that way, as one is apt to do in such thinking.) Why had they allowed that prating young scoundrel with his mouth full of fine sentiments and his heart full of deceit to beguile them from it?

'I distrusted the fellow from the beginning,' says Coote to Hamilton.

'You think their intentions towards us are not friendly?'

'I believe that young *soour* (pig) brought us in here purposely to secure us, and that he has now gone into Khizrabad to give notice of our being here.'

But the men keep their fears to themselves. They pretend to believe that the young Brahmin will be back soon, that the messenger will be despatched to Abdoolapore. And they are exhausted and sleepy. And the most of them, the two sisters and Coote and Hamilton, are soon asleep. But sleep cannot come to the father and mother, to the young man whose bride to be is placed in a position of such danger.

These hold anxious conference together. 'If they wish to deliver us up for the sake of the reward, we must offer them a larger reward to take us into Abdoolapore,' says Fane. 'We will give them anything they ask,' says Hay. And so they confer and discuss and lament — and lament and discuss and confer. And the moon, now riding high in the heavens, floods the enclosure with her silver light. That glorious splendour seems a mockery of their woe. And then Hay, thinking that the husband and wife would like to be by themselves, leaves them and begins pacing up and down the enclosure. He continues pacing up and down it, while the moon is speeding across the sky and the moments go rushing by. He has never passed such a vigil as this. His brain is racked, his heart is torn with sorrows and fears. His heart rises in wild rebellion.

Surely there are some things for which it is impossible to say unto the Lord, 'Thy will be done.' And then his heart rises in earnest prayer—'Deliver us, O Lord! O Lord! deliver them.' And then he hears the gate being stealthily opened, and

he pauses in his sad pacing, and he sees the man on watch coming up the enclosure, the naked sword he bears in his hand gleaming in the bright moonshine. What does this mean?—murder? Hay steps forward to confront the man. The Brahmin advances close up to him. Now is Hay's courage put to the utmost test. At no moment during the past three days has the strain on his nerves been so severe as at this. The man advances up to him until their faces almost touch. 'Awaken the others,' he whispers; 'and depart out of this as soon as you can.'

'Out of this—out of the village?'

'Yes. What is intended against you is not a good thing, and I will have no part in it. I will not have the guilt of your blood upon my soul, upon this village. Quick, awaken the others.'

They are all awakened. They have reached the gate. They pass with their lightest footsteps by the other men of the guard lying fast asleep on their quilts and carpets on the ground by the side of the gateway. They are moving away from the village. The girls might have thought that this was a dream-deliverance in their sleep, did not their painful feet so fully assure them that they were awake.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE BYRAGEE.

IF, as they are hurrying away from the Brahmin village, their deliverance would have seemed to Beatrice and Lilian Fane as a dream if it had not been for their paining feet, to their mother, to Hay, it seems like the awaking from some horrid nightmare. In proportion to the agony of a few minutes ago is now their relief. They stay not to find or follow the pathway. They make straight across the open fields until they have got well away from the village. Then they stop. They guess which way Abdoolapore may lie, and bend their steps in that direction. But they have to make constant deviations from it on account of the villages or hamlets. They find no road or pathway that they can follow for any length of time. It seems to them as if most of these pathways ran at right angles to the course they wished to follow: that is due to their condition of mind. They pass across fields in which the sharp-edged or knotty roots of the cut maize or cut sugar-cane wound and bruise their ankles and feet; or they stumble across

others in which the hard ridges or huge clods are almost as terrible for the quite, or almost, bare, the cut and blistered feet of poor Mrs. Fane and her daughters. For some time they are able to follow the bank of an artificial channel, the water running in which is very pleasant to the eye, and its soft, smooth, grass-covered pathway most delightful to the feet. But now it sweeps away in the wrong direction, and they have once more to move across the hard dry fields. They pass over the high-lying fields, from which the wheat harvest has recently been cut, across the low-lying ones, now white and dry, over which the water will be standing and the green mantle of the young rice spread in another month or two. They traverse pieces of waste land covered with wild caper and other thorny bushes. Then they find their progress arrested by a narrow but deep drainage line, which they find in furious flow—this water must come from the great canal, of which the small channel which had afforded them such agreeable walking was a tributary. They must find a crossing. Which way are they to go, up or down? Down is more in their direction. They must keep the moon behind them. They keep along the edge, but still they find no place to cross: and now the moon is to their right, and now in front of them. This will not do, so they retrace their steps. They follow the stream upward, and now to their joy it turns in the right direction, and there is the Pole star a little to the left, and the moon well behind them. They pass through a long stretch of babool or kikar trees—this is the *Acacia Arabica*—from the huge spike-like thorns of which many of them suffer greatly, and on emerging from it they find the moon straight in front of them and the Pole star behind them. This is maddening! The precious hours of the night are passing away; the early coming dawn with its sharp, clear light will soon be here. Are they never to get across this stream? 'We can only go one way,' says Major Cooté, even he angered, 'and we may as well keep going upward.' And then the Pole star is in front and the moon behind again. In short, the stream has here a very tortuous course, runs in long loops. They have worked round a long stretch of the acacia jungle through which they could not have forced their way, and arrived again at the bank of the stream, when they miss the sound of the rushing water, and, looking down, find the channel quite dry. They have got above the point of junction of the escape channel of the canal. They scramble down one bank and up the other not without difficulty, both the banks being very steep; but those

tortuous windings of the stream have cost them much time, and they are anxious to hurry on, and could not delay to look for an easier crossing. They move over the stretch of waste which, as usual, marks the course of the drainage line. Again they find a deep, narrow channel across their path; it must be the same one come round with a wide sweep.

But now there is no perpendicular bank, or rushing water, or alas! dim light, to make it difficult for them to cross. Beyond is still the flat level barren plain, through which the stream meanders, and then they arrive at the edge of a heavy dhâk jungle standing upon it. It is a specially dense one, and as they pass in among the thick-standing, large-leaved trees, there is a delightful sweet coolness in the air, and they have actually green grass—a mere wash, but still green grass—beneath their feet, and it is covered with little white flowers, little white flowers like their own loved English daisy. But alas for the light that enables them to see them! The undesired and unwelcome morning is now breaking. The time for general movement has come, and they are once more conspicuous on the face of the land, in an alien country, and amid a now inimical people. What shall they do? Shall they press on at every risk, or shall they face the terrible ordeal of another day in the open, and remain where they are? This jungle seems to possess the merit of solitariness in a supreme degree. They must be very remote from the habitations of men, for they hear not a sound connected with them—not the bleating of flocks, nor the lowing of herds, nor the barking of dogs. They sit down to rest, and discuss the matter. While doing so, the deep silence around them is broken by a sudden rustle. Then, that is surely the sound of a human voice!

‘What was that?’

‘I thought it was someone calling “Aao! Aao!”’ (‘Come! Come!’)

They listen. Yes; those are the words, softly but clearly spoken. In England our ears are not attuned to angel voices now. But a native of the land who had passed that way, and not found out from whence the words came, would have told when he got home how in the dhâk jungle he had heard the voice of a spirit, the soft voice of a female spirit. (We must give sex to our supernatural beings, even to a ‘First Cause’). ‘Aao! Aao!’—soft words, but they fall harshly on their ears. For whom is the invitation meant? For them or someone else? ‘Come! Come!’ And now they hear

a whining and rustling in the bushes around them, a rustling and whining which seems to be now here, now there; now in this direction and now in that; and now around them. What can all this mean? Are there spirits about? Many of them are just in a condition of nerve to see them. But instead of something supernatural they see a surprising natural sight. Before them lies a long narrow open glade. From under a bush at one side of this appears a jackal, and from under another bush another jackal, and then a pair of jackals run on to it from this side, and a pair of jackals run on to it from the other; and the jackals all move down the alley to its further end, some at a gentle satisfied trot, others at an easy joyous gallop. And then, like men suddenly emerging from an ambush, jackals run on to the glade from every point of the surrounding belt of trees and bushes; and they all hurry down it to the further end, with various forms of movement, but all more or less quick, and various kinds of cries, not the howls and yells with which they usually make night hideous, but far softer whines and gentler barkings. And there they all pull up in a mass. And now there is a sudden commotion in the pack, a sudden accession of whining, a sudden jumping about and leaping over one another, a sudden cocking of ears and whisking of tails. And still greater is the commotion when a man appears and begins to throw something among them from a wallet which he carries slung over his shoulder. This continues for a little while, and then the man unslings the wallet and empties it over them, and then gives it a wave. This is evidently a recognised signal, for the animals immediately separate and run back and disappear under the bushes, and the glade is left empty as before. As the man moves up the alley, the astonished onlookers observe that he every now and then puts his fingers into a little bag he carries and deposits a little mound of something white upon the ground.

‘He is putting down flour for the ants,’ says Major Coote. This is a well-known form of beneficence in the East.

The man has now come quite near to them. He has not seen them, because his eyes were bent on the ground. But now he catches sight of them. He exhibits no sign of astonishment, but walks quietly up to them. He salutes them with a peculiarly soft and graceful movement of his hand and arm, and cries ‘*Râm ! Râm !*’ to them in a peculiarly soft and gentle tone of voice. The voice, the accent, and the gesture are those of a man of birth and breeding, though the stranger’s dress is that of a faquir. The fair-

ness and fineness of the skin, and the well-cut features, are also indicative of good birth, of a superior social class. He is a man of the middle height, and his figure is slender and graceful. He appears to be in the prime of life, though his dark hair and beard are beginning to be streaked with grey. He surveys them with a kind regard, with a mild and benign look.

'Peace be with you, children of God,' he says in his soft voice. 'You have escaped, I suppose, from Khizrabad, where there has been such terrible shedding of blood. Oh that man should shed the blood of his brother man!'

'We have,' says Major Coote, curtly.

'You are in danger of your lives if you are seen of any of the people about here,' goes on the faquir. 'They have slain many of your countrymen. You must come with me to my hut. That is the only place where you will be safe, where your precious lives will not be in danger of being lost.'

'We met a man yesterday who spoke to us in the manner you do now, and then betrayed us. He too was a holy man, a Brahmin like yourself,' says Hay, bitterly.

'I am not a Brahmin now; and which of us is holy? I will not betray you. Now that I have come upon you it has become a sacred obligation with me to prevent you from losing your lives. You will know for certain that I could not betray you to death when I tell you that I am a Kabirpanthi, a Ramanandi.'

Each of us expands his own dunghill into the universe. Our own thoughts and feelings and opinions form the infinite and the eternal. There is a ring round the thinker in London as there is round the thinker in Mecca and Benares; but that ring is not so big, does not gird in the whole universe, the present and the future, all eternity, as each of them imagines. To this man standing here, the truth, the whole truth, the only truth, the eternal truth, lay in the teachings of one Ramanand, of whom these English people had never before even heard, as is most likely the case with the reader also.

'You know not what a Kabirpanthi is! Strange! But you English people live entirely apart from us. We Ramanandis are the followers of the great *guru*' (teacher), 'Ramanand, with whom the sacredness of life was the leading tenet of his moral code. All life comes from God, and is a portion of his divine substance, is an effluence of that bright influence uncreate. All life is therefore most precious, that of the insect as much as that

of the elephant, and to be cherished and not destroyed. You English people hold the contrary. You slay too much. Therefore I like you not. But still I am bound to preserve your lives. We are careful to avoid all destruction of life even accidentally. We are careful how we walk, lest we tread on some insect; many of us go about with our mouths covered lest their breath should poison some form of life in the air.'

'I have seen that,' says Coote.

'I will tell you about myself, so that you may see that you can trust me. I am a man of substance, a zemindar' (landed proprietor). 'I have houses and lands, a wife and children, servants. But these are the things that clog the soul and prevent one from attaining to the perfect holy life. I determined to rid me of them and retire to some lonely place and dwell there by myself. I first resolved to depart into some forest wild, of which I should be the sole occupant, and there meditate, and feed the beasts and birds around me. The sheep, the oxen, the goats, the dogs and cats, and the domestic birds, are all taken care of in the habitations of men. But who is there to feed the birds and beasts in the wilderness? I should do this. But then I reflected that the highest form of life is the human. In the lonely forest I should not be able to minister to it. I must seek some solitary spot through which men passed, even if they did not abide there. I have found what I wanted here. Here is this lonely jungle in which the wild beasts and wild birds dwell, and around it stretches the great lonely uninhabited plain. Across that plain and by this forest runs a track leading from Rajpootana to Hurdwar. At the time of the Hurdwar fair this road is thronged with pilgrims. Thus, then, here I could be solitary for most part of the year, and yet be able to minister to thousands of people at one period of it. So here I have set up my resting-place. The pilgrims—the pious men and women—had to toil across this great plain, on which there is no village, no wells, during the hot months of the year; and think what their sufferings must have been from the want of water.'

'We can tell—we have recently experienced them,' says Coote.

'Poor people!' says the Byragee tenderly. 'And so here, in the middle of the plain, I have sunk a well by the side of the road, and built a little hut near it. I feed the birds and beasts in the jungle, and give water to the pilgrims from the well. You had better come with me, and I will give you shelter in my hut. You will be safe there.'

'The man who betrayed us yesterday also said that all men should love one another, and not injure one another—that was to be the leading precept in his new religion.'

'His new religion—a young man?'

'Yes.'

'With English shoes? Puh!'

'Yes.'

'I know him—a foolish young fellow. His head full of wind. But I did not think he would be guilty of treachery. If his feet have gone astray, it is because he has no settled path to walk on. But you need not fear any treachery from me.'

His sweet open countenance seems to give full assurance of that. They do not see that they can do better than follow him.

They accompany him down the glade, and then he turns into another one and stops in the middle of it and gives a peculiar whistle, and the birds come fluttering round him and he throws them grain. They have arrived at the edge of the jungle, and the barren plain runs away before them as far as the eye can reach. The track across it touches the forest here, and so it is here that the faquir has sunk his well and planted his lonely dwelling-place. The latter is a small hut with mud walls and a flat-terraced roof—truly a hermit's cell. There is but one doorway leading into it: to this there is no door.

'Why, you said we should be quite safe here,' exclaims Hay. 'You do not call this house secure?'

'You are more safe within it than you would be in any fort or fortress. No one can enter it without first setting foot on the worshipping place without, and no one dare do that. The room is therefore a sanctuary.'

The hut was raised some three feet from the ground, and in front of it extended a square platform of beaten clay of the same height. Round the edges of this platform were twelve dwarf pillars, one at each of the four corners, the others between. The special incarnation of the Divine Being chosen by Ramanand for the worship of himself and his followers was Vishnu: therefore they worshipped also Vishnu's wife, Sita; and his half brother Lukshman, and his faithful friend Hunoomān, the monkey-god. Then again Tulasee was the favourite mistress of Vishnu. Her jealous spouse changed her into a plant. Vishnu, in order to enjoy her company, transformed himself into the Sālarāma, an ammonite found in some of the Himalayan streams, and now

greatly valued as an object of worship. Our concern with all this mythology is this :—On the dwarf pillars round the raised platform were placed representations, in baked clay, of the monkey god ; of the various forms taken on himself by Vishnu ; images of Lukshmi and of Sita ; earthen pots containing the sacred tulsi plant ; while in the centre of it, in the position of honour, had been placed an ammonite of very unusual size ; and so on the platform and the hut beside it was conferred a sacred and inviolable character. It was to this that the eremite trusted for their safety.

‘No one knows that you are here—no one is likely to come here to molest you. If they did, you would be as safe within that hut as behind the walls of any of your forts, even the mighty ones of Allahabad or of Agra.’

The fugitives would all, most decidedly, have preferred to be within the forts, under the shadow of their walls. The ammonite, and the tulsi plant, and the monkey-god, were all very well, but they would much rather have trusted for their safety to the protecting powers of a few English bayonets. But here they are.

The seeker after spiritual perfection then busies himself in providing for the bodily wants of his guests. He draws water from the well for them to drink and wash with, he brings out the parched grain which is what he himself now chiefly lives on. He waits on them most assiduously, on the women with tender solicitude. He washes Lilian’s poor lacerated feet, and binds them up for her. He gives Hay’s wounded arm the cleaning and dressing which it needs so much. All this is evidently a labour of love to him : nothing can exceed his kindness. But with the fugitives the chief thought, of course, is how they are to get into Abdoolapore. They consult the Byragee.

‘I have some disciples in the neighbouring villages,’ says the holy man, ‘and two of them are coming to me to-day for religious instruction. They will be here very soon. These can guide you into Abdoolapore to-night, or one of them could take a letter in from you stating that you are here and asking for an escort to be sent out for you. I should advise the latter. The great danger to you is immediately round Abdoolapore, which is now as a beleaguered city. The man would reach Abdoolapore early in the afternoon and the escort ought to be out here by the evening.’ Yes—that is what they will do. The Byragee brings out some paper and the reed pen which he now employs, not on secular business, but only in the inditing of holy things. They write a few lines

—they have to write on a very small piece of paper, such as can easily be concealed about the person—stating that four officers and three ladies are in concealment here and asking for help. For the sake of greater safety they write them in French. The disciples now arrive, two decent-looking young country lads.

‘You can trust them?’ asks the anxious Hay.

‘To the death,’ says the Byragee. ‘Do you not know that to the disciple his master or instructor comes next after God: before his father even: for his father begot his body only, while the teacher is the father of his soul?’

As the young man chosen to carry the missive has to pass through his own village on the way, he is told to change the clean white garments in which he has come to visit his spiritual instructor and put on his ordinary work-a-day garb—he is a carpenter by trade.

We have now to accompany the bearer of the little piece of paper on which the lives of so many people hung.

(To be continued.)

